

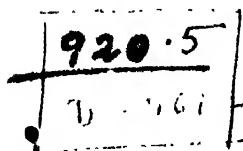
## THE LONG YEAR



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*by*

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*London*

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*FOR BOB PATERSON*



# PART ONE



# I

THIS is a diary begun on the first day of September, 1939, and ending roughly a year later. I was a newspaper editor then and began my self-imposed task in the eager expectation that what I would have to record would be of some moment. Few, I think, could have anticipated the record it proved to be. The year ahead was certainly a momentous one, but it was also one of the strangest and most fascinating periods in our history, unlike anything that had ever gone before. Or anything—one almost says 'alas'!—that can ever happen again.

As an editor, I was privileged to see something of it behind the scenes and to meet many of the principal characters in the drama, farce, tragedy—or whatever it could be called. It was all three, of course.

Much of this diary could have been set down by anyone, for the experiences and the emotions were common to millions. It is full of the trivial and the important, the dull and the exciting; the things we did and said, the impatience we felt, the angers we expressed, the misjudgements we made, the mistakes we tolerated, the jokes we laughed at, the books we read and the plays we saw—the whole way of life of a remarkable year, and a remarkable people.

But some of this strange chronicle could only have come from someone in my position in a newspaper office, and a great deal of it was peculiar to my particular newspaper and

to myself. It should stand as it was written, sometimes very scrappily, sometimes with much fuller and more revealing detail than I had remembered, if it is to be anything of a true account.

*Friday, 1st September, 1939*

Well, this looks like it at last.

Things seem ~~ed~~ black when I phoned the office at midnight last night. Hitler had presented the Poles with something that savoured very much of an ultimatum, and the Poles had 'angered' him by not toeing the line. So they told me at the office. 'It looks pretty black', they said.

When I phoned again this morning it looked blacker.

'Warsaw has been bombed', my secretary said. 'It's started.'

'You're sure?'

'Yes. The report has been confirmed.'

Well, that was that. It had come. All the tension, the anxiety, the exasperation, the hopes and fears of these last few days finished and done with. It was almost a relief.

Almost, but not quite. Too much was at stake. The future lay ahead, too grimly uncertain for all anxiety to be removed simply by the advent of one kind of certainty.

I tried to telephone my home in the country.

'It's no use', said the hotel switch-girl. 'Calls are being restricted.'

In the streets everything seemed much as usual. Fewer buses, perhaps, because it was the first morning of the evacuation of London's million children. A small grouping of people round the newspaper-seller. A faint tenseness in the atmosphere like the oppressiveness before thunder. A certain indefinable 'something', but then that may have been my imagination. Sandbags were being filled and put into position against the lower windows of all big offices. Workers, stripped to their vest, worked jokingly in the morning sunshine.

In Doughty Street a family car was being packed with

suitcases and children. Father, in shirt-sleeves, was sweating. Already the street posters were telling the world: GERMANY INVADES POLAND.

Impossible to realise that for thousands of men the long-predicted war had begun; that at this moment men were dying, bravely, fearlessly, and in many cases uselessly.

At the office there was a brightness in the eyes of the staff—that brightness revealing emotion, excitement or anxiety. They had been through it lately with crisis succeeding crisis, with Hitler alarms and threats and Notes. The tension was released at last.

This was it. This was what we had been foretelling in the paper for years. My staff is young—as in all newspaper offices: what will become of them in the days ahead?

They look at me out of their bright eyes—their leader, I suppose, at this moment—waiting for something to come out of me that will express what they are feeling. They are smiling as if they had lived to see something come true that they had not really believed in.

And my first job is to tell them what to do in the event of an air raid, to take them down the stairs (following the green arrows) to the basement, to detail room wardens who will see that rooms are speedily vacated if danger comes, to arrange for a supply of electric torches, chocolates, magazines to take with us on our flight, to listen to their friendly laughter when they realise that I shall be left standing in the corridor upstairs while they are hurrying safely below. That is a joke on the boss.

In the basement, among the rolls of newsprint, there is a feeling of safety.

And then in the office upstairs—the sense of unreality—the quiet suspense of waiting, the sudden dying of interest in our normal activities. All that we have put into our work (all the planning, the long hours, the unflagging loyalty) is being scuppered, it seems, at this moment.

What the shape of the paper will be tomorrow night when we go to press for Sunday, God only knows.

I lunched with 'D'. He's waiting to hear from the War Office. Bill has been called up, and is already away—in the

R.A.F. We talk of old times—of 1918—when it all seemed ended.

'D' will certainly be in it again. As for myself, I am also waiting to hear. My offer of service at the time of the Munich crisis was 'duly recorded', I was informed then, 'and full use of it will be made if unfortunately another crisis occurs'. Mr Hore-Belisha would see to it! Well, this is that 'other crisis'.

Everybody is quiet and confident. There is no outward excitement, but there are plenty of people getting out of London.

Asked Philip Gibbs if he was prepared to act as our war correspondent on the Western Front in the event of war. He has some connection with the Ministry of Information, but is eager to accept, although 'my eyes aren't what they were', he says.

J. L. Hodson is another likely war correspondent. Hodson has had bad luck with his book *Jonathan North*. It came out about a month ago and should have been the big book of the autumn. Now it looks like going down the drain—with so many other good things.

Got Chamberlain's speech in the office before leaving. A fine speech, denouncing Hitler. Something like this eighteen months ago might have had an effect on the march of events.

And then to dinner with Lottie and Nick out at Brent. My first war dinner. A hot, stifling night, with 'London's first experience of black-out. There was Will Nixon, a brilliant gynaecologist, sitting in the lounge, sipping a sherry and reading *Emergency Surgery*!

'I've lost touch with this end of doctoring', he says, 'but now, as an air-raid doctor, I've got to freshen myself up.'

We listen to the German radio threatening punishment and death to any German who listens-in to foreign broadcasts.

We exchange stories of the last war. Lottie was ten then. She fled from the advancing Russians with her parents. For two months she lived in sheds and railway trucks and almost starved. Nick was a youngster in Russia and saw the German fleet shell the Russians.

Back to my hotel. Rain, steady drizzling rain, and the



eerie, unusual blackness of London. Lines of cars, their headlamps so dimmed that they seemed almost unlighted, sizzling over the wet roads.

All London in darkness. What a transformation! Voices out of the darkness, drunks singing. To bed at 1 a.m. with a review copy of a book, *This is the Schoolroom*, by Nicholas Monsarrat,\* which seems now unlikely to be published. A pity, for it is a good bit of work.

It is quiet in the room, and safe and secure. The rain is steadily coming down. London is very quiet tonight.

*Saturday, 2nd September, 1939*

It isn't yet war, although what can stop it now is difficult to see. A day of waiting, of rumour and expectation. In a newspaper office, nothing is so frustrating as waiting. Although Press day, I spent the hour between two and three in the bright afternoon going about London.

All around were the signs of the approaching war. Hundreds of balloons in the blue sky—the balloon barrage to force air raiders high into the sky for the guns to get at them, and to prevent dive-bombing. Trenches being dug and completed. Soldiers—Territorials mostly, so young-looking that it was a shock to see them—going to their depots, kit-bags across shoulders, suitcases in hands.

They are incredibly young. I must have been as young—younger indeed—when I joined the army in the last war. What are they feeling? Nothing, perhaps.

I can't remember that the thought of the future oppressed me unduly when I joined up. It is only later in life, when knowledge and imagination colour each passing experience, that one thinks and dreams and fears.

London is deserted. There are still private cars being packed with suitcases. Londoners are on the run for the country.

\*This book was published and, in spite of the war, got very good notices. Monsarrat became a lieutenant in the Royal Navy and later wrote *H.M. Corvette*. And, still later, that brilliant best-seller, *The Cruel Sea*.

It is already like a city of the dead on this sunny Saturday afternoon, with its blinds drawn, and its sandbags against its walls and windows, and its depleted bus services, and its empty echoing streets, and its civilian policemen wearing steel helmets.

It is a depressing London, but not a discouraging one. It is a London getting ready.

Just before the early edition of the paper goes to press in the evening, Chamberlain rises to speak in the Commons.

We wait for him in the office, ready to take every 'flash' of the speech. It is 7.40 in the evening and the front page goes in at 8.15. Everything else is away. We are standing by for the declaration of war.

Yesterday the Prime Minister said we had asked Hitler to withdraw his troops. Today we know it is war. Very tense in the office; even more tense on the 'stone' where the front page waits.

And then comes the speech—ripped off the tape machines, sentence by sentence. Anti-climax. Germany gets one more chance—no mention of the Poles and their plight. You can see on everybody's face the contempt and sense of disillusion. Good old Chamberlain!

So we went to press; another statement promised for Sunday.

I slipped out for some food, and over dinner at the Savoy heard from Beverley Baxter something of the scene in the House of Commons.

'Members were bewildered and bitter. The spirit of the country seemed not to be understood by Chamberlain. It was left to Arthur Greenwood, the Labour opposition, to say something of what they were feeling. 'Speak for England!' Amery called out to him from the Conservative benches as he rose. 'Speak for the people!' There was a roar of approval.

Chamberlain sat, pale and distressed by the strain of the crisis.

There was a midnight meeting of the Cabinet, while blacked-out London was lit up by the most spectacular storm

for years, and hosed by a torrential downpour of rain. Ministers trudged through the storm, and Emergency Fire and A.R.P. controls were called out.

It took me an hour to secure a taxi and crawl through splashed, dark streets to the hotel. Hot, sticky day; distressing night. And still the issue in doubt. But not in our leader: 'The world is entering into travail', we say. 'Out of this travail we must see to it that a saner and better world arises. In the spirit of a crusade we begin this awful march forward.'

Bed at 4 a.m. after making arrangements for special edition if necessary tomorrow.

*Sunday, 3rd September, 1939*

Sunday . . . a London morning with bright patches of sunshine; a washed and brushed-up London after last night's storm, but stuffy and hot.

I did not wait for breakfast, but got into the office early to make our preparations for the day in case of special editions. Then, as a long day seemed likely, I went back to my hotel and ordered a breakfast-lunch, and had a bath and shave.

I was enjoying my food when Chamberlain's voice came over the radio. I sipped my orange juice. Here was the ordinary everyday luxury of living that was about to disappear. My eyes went over the tray in front of me—coffee with lots of milk; a silver dish with scrambled eggs and sausages on it; rolls and *croissants* and lots of butter, and several jams—while my ears heard the tired voice of the Prime Minister:

'I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street.

'This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government an official Note stating that unless we heard from them by eleven o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us.

'I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.'

And then, dramatically, incredibly, the warning wail of air raid sirens! It was too dramatic. The effect was so startling as to be beyond belief. Twenty minutes after war had been declared the German planes were already headed for London. What timing! *Heil Hitler!*

I looked out of the open window. Into the sky the balloons, battered down or hauled down in last night's storm, were slowly ascending—gleaming, friendly, reassuring.

The sirens were going on. Whistles were blowing in the streets. Cars were pulling into the kerbs. People were running, but no signs of panic.

I waited, but nothing happened. The streets were deserted save for A.R.P. wardens. People had gone to ground.

In twenty minutes the all-clear was given—it had been no test, but a real warning because an unknown aircraft had been sighted on the coast (later proved to be friendly). But it was a good beginning, and a warning of what perhaps was to come.

In the office, phoned my home and discovered warning had been general. Brought out 'stamped-in' editions of paper. War Cabinet includes Churchill—First Lord of the Admiralty.

I remember a lunch I had with him at his house in Westerham two years ago. We had been discussing the international situation and the gathering clouds.

'I am afraid nothing can stop it now', Mr Churchill said. 'Hitler has the bit between his teeth and all Europe will be his charging ground.'

And at this moment, on this Sunday morning of fate, Churchill is saying in the House of Commons:

'In this solemn hour it is a consolation to recall and to dwell upon our repeated efforts for peace. All have been ill-starred, but all have been faithful and sincere. . . . Outside, the storms of war may blow and the lands may be lashed with the fury of its gales, but in our own hearts this Sunday morning there is peace. Our hands may be active but our consciences are at rest.'

Home to the country in the evening, fifty miles away from

it all, about ten o'clock. Lovely to leave it all behind for a spell and to go out on the Sussex Downs in the moonlight and walk over the dew-cool grass and smell the smells of the countryside.

Diana was asleep, but John called out: 'Daddy!'

I went in to him. He told me, holding me in the dark room, about the air-raid warning that morning, and how he had been the first to hear it.

Already their young lives are being coloured by Hitler.

Marjorie and Sheila have been at it all day—blackening curtains for the windows, screening lights. Our evacuated refugees are not two children, but a mother and child—Mrs Coleman and Alan—fifteen months old.

I go into the kitchen, where the mother is sitting with Roberts, to welcome her. She is a nice girl. Her husband drives a motor-oil truck. She comes from Battersea and she does not want to be away from London. 'But you've got to think of the children', she says.

Apparently the evacuation arrangements miscarried, and instead of children only our village got mothers and children and expectant mothers! I can see trouble ahead—with so few doctors in the district.

To bed about twelve, with an odd feeling in one's middle that at any moment there may be the drone of planes.

*Monday, 4th September, 1939*

A warm sun-splashed morning on the Downs, the English Channel gleaming in the sunshine only four miles away. I work in shorts, stripped to the waist, digging a vegetable garden where we had planned ultimately to put a tennis court.

Diana clears the flints, John the turfs. And oh! how flinty this down-land is! Marjorie and Sheila lend a hand.

Skinner—wounded in the last war—is coming up in the afternoon to help on the job. All his usual spare-time jobs have gone, and as yet there is no place for him in the war. That will all be changed presently when we all sort ourselves out and fall into place.

I suggest a stolen swim—'stolen' in the sense that it is unexpected in a world where one expected catastrophe—and we get into the car and go to Seaford. A week ago it was gay and crowded with holiday-makers and the roads buzzed with cars. Now it is deserted.

We are the only people on the beach. Ships in the Channel are keeping close to the coast line for fear of submarines or mines, and the water is slightly oily. But a lovely swim and a brief sun-bath afterwards.

And on the way home again the newspaper posters tell us of the first German atrocity, the sinking of the *Athenia* (on which mother returned from Canada so recently) with fourteen hundred people on board bound for Montreal. No warning. The German Navy again--how it brings back all the horrible days of the last war.

This is a quick start to horrors. And when the Germans were doing that last night, our planes had flown over many German towns dropping—not bombs—but leaflets.

Trouble in some of the neighbouring villages, as I thought there would be. Some of our frightful people deserve to be bombed. Several have declined point-blank to take in evacuated mothers and babies from London, and when compelled to have behaved in a very inhuman way.

A fine impression of the middle and upper classes some of the poor people will have. Multiply some of the tales I hear by even a small portion of the evacuated 600,000 and we've got a fine breeding-ground for the class war.

What a spirit to start the war with! And what a grand chance the war has presented us with for the sinking of the individual in the national cause, and bringing about a better feeling and understanding between people.

A beautiful evening. Working, stripped to the waist, sawing gorse-bush roots for firewood for the winter. The winter! I wonder what the winter will bring to us. Later there is a yellow moon and a million stars, and a dark, still, peaceful night. It is warm now—as I write this in bed, with not a sound to break the stillness but the scratching of my pencil. Peace, or the sense of it, is such a cosy thing.

*Tuesday, 5th September, 1939*

A curious war, this.

Somehow nothing seems to be happening. Perhaps it is because it is not happening to one's-self. Perhaps it is the golden warm sunshine with its suggestion of enduring peace. But certainly there appears to be a marking-time.

The R.A.F. has bombed a couple of German warships, and the *Athonia's* survivors have been landed, saying that shells were fired by the U-boat on the helpless ship.

But, apart from that—nothing. Waiting . . . preparing perhaps. Another summer-like day. Another stolen swim in the early morning at Seaford; then up to London.

Work at the office, all our ideas now angled to war. We arrange for 'Sapper's' war-time stories, Philip Gibbs' articles, an article by R. C. Sherriff, author of *Journey's End*. The same continuing feeling of unreality, with the silver balloons in the blue sky eternally on guard.

There is something unreal, too, in preparing a 'war-time' paper, packed with war articles and features, while all around is peace—and the soothing sunshine. And nothing really happening.

Marion phoned. She wants to get back to Canada. She came here, a nice girl of eighteen, hoping to win fame and success on the stage. I got her an audition with C. B. Cochran. And now—no theatres, no cinemas, no Marion. It's too bad for the girl, who has courage and confidence.

Got out of London against my usual custom and went home to the country at eight in the evening. A beautiful still, clear night. Peaceful on the hill under the stars.

*Wednesday, 6th September, 1939*

Woken up at 8 a.m. by the sound of air-raid sirens to an incredibly lovely morning. Went down in dressing-gown and had cup of tea on the lawn, waiting in the sunshine. The children had been brought in from the garden and sat finishing their breakfast in the hall, which is rather 'sheltered'.

I wandered down to the gate leading to Janson's field. The morning sun was warm and comforting. The world

was very still. Newhaven in the valley was hidden by a thin film of mist. The Downs pierced upwards through it like round rocks in a white sea. What was happening in the mist over the Channel? Were they coming this time?

Nothing happened. The 'all-clear' sounded in thirty minutes and we went down by car to Seaford and stole another bathe in the sea. Wonderful September mornings—the sea like glass, smooth, cool, invigorating, I swam for fifteen minutes.

Caught the London train from Seaford. Heard on board that Folkestone and Dover had been bombed. Refreshment-car attendant, himself an old soldier, agreed with me that it seemed an odd kind of war. Perhaps that is because things were happening to us, personally, in the last war, and they haven't yet started. Are they happening to anybody anywhere?

After hours of uncertainty, during which the wildest rumours were in circulation in London (Chatham had been bombed to bits and hundreds killed; two Nazi planes had been brought down), the Ministry of Information finally gave out the information that enemy planes had tried to penetrate our defences and had been driven off by fighters. Our anti-aircraft guns fired at our own planes.

It seems that the Government or the Ministry of Information does not understand psychology very clearly. Panic spread with rumour, and rumour thrives on official silence. Still, having in mind some of the personnel at the Ministry, I am not surprised at anything. And the B.B.C., short of real information, are equally groping.

Dusk saw London blacker, grimmer, stranger than ever. People move about warily, guided by hand torches. Every street is like an unlighted country lane, with great dangers from the traffic.

All life seems to come to an end at dusk. No cinemas, no theatres, the restaurants half-empty, the hotels deserted. At the hotel where I put up most of the week, only thirteen people are staying. The two top floors have been closed.

Dinner with Sam at the Café Royal. All day he has been pasting up Air Raid Precaution shelter notices in Kensington,





driving round in a car and plastering the walls of shops.

We celebrate something or other (this world we never expected) with champagne cocktails and cold grouse-and-steak pie with a green salad. Delicious. I put it down deliberately in my diary now because I know what war is—and what it does eventually to food. There will be a change of diet before we are through. A change of everything. Let us appreciate the pause, but I am certain that the future holds hell.

The war still seems very far away, and everybody apathetic. And I am conscious, more than conscious, of a growing personal restlessness.

*Thursday, 7th September, 1939*

Awake to the news that the French have had a go at the Siegfried line loop and made slight advances. Not before time. The poor Poles are taking a socking all right and Warsaw looks like falling.

Perhaps we'll wake up when Hitler finishes with Poland and turns the full fury of his attack on us.

First pictures from the Eastern front now in the office don't look very pretty. We are still bombing Germany—with propaganda leaflets.

Another brilliantly sunny day. Home to the country early in the evening to hear that the Searchlight Company down the hill are planning to move up on to our land—build huts, etc. Fourteen men and two officers. So this is war brought to our very hearths! Grim! !

I get in the car and drive down to their tents and am taken to see the C.O.—Licut. Reeves. We have a drink in his tent and look at the map of the hill, and talk of detectors, searchlights, Lewis guns (still used for low-flying planes apparently), and the war. Reeves seems a nice chap, who used to work in an electricity office.

It's funny to be with these men and not to be one of them. They seem to be having all the fun, here on the hill with their toys, and I am out of it. But, of course, I am keeping up the national morale through my newspaper! Very

important! Back in the dusk to our house on the hill, and to the B.B.C. news broadcast.

Earlier in the day talked with Terence Horsley, who is going out as a war correspondent. A bit worried about his two children, but it seems a grand chance for him just the same.

It is still and peaceful on the hill, and starry in the utter blackness. All the twinkling lights of Newhaven and Lewes that we used to see from our hill have disappeared. The world seems so locked out.

*Friday, 8th September, 1939*

Another golden morning, the sun coming up through a hot haze.

Another swim. Took the children and Marjorie, Sheila, Mrs Coleman and Alan to the sea; caught the train to London from Seaford.

Took my War Office letter of 'thanks for previous offer of service' (last September crisis) up with me. Just to remind the Powers That Be about it. This restlessness is getting me down.

An interesting lunch with Lord Kemsley, with some vigorous criticism of the Ministry of Information.

We are all sick that gallant adventures like the bombing of the German battleships at Kiel should be given only a bare communiqué.

'It's another Zeebrugge', said Herbert Morgan, 'and we tell the public nothing about it.'

I am planning Liddell Hart as a weekly commentator on the progress of the war, and my regular contributor Beverley Nichols as the sort of 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' end of the team.

Like myself, Nichols is a still young forty, and restless. He came in after lunch. He has just managed to get back from France, where he was on holiday.

'We met the French Army on its way to the Italian frontier', he told me. 'Long lines of men and guns. The French don't trust the Italians an inch. They're leaving nothing to chance.' His car was commandeered by a French officer, and alto-

gether he seems to have had a pretty difficult time getting back.

Poor Beverley. He is torn to bits by this war. He wrote his book *Cry Havoc* to show the world his pacifist attitude. He avowed his faith publicly at a great meeting in the Albert Hall. He wrote an article for one of the popular magazines saying he would rather be shot than help war in any way.

'It's not just this war or any war', he says now, rubbing a nervous hand over his face, and looking at me bleakly. 'It's all war. You, Jimmy, believe that there can be something worse than war; but I believe that war is the ultimate horror and crime.'

This isn't the moment to remind him of the faith that he and many other well-meaning but misguided people in this country, and millions in Germany, put in Hitler, and how Hitler has betrayed them all.

We went over that path many times in the last few years, I never wavering from my belief that Hitler would ultimately plunge us all into it, Beverley believing (sometimes a little desperately) that Hitler meant good, not evil. On many occasions I had to append an editorial note at the end of Beverley's article, making it clear that my newspaper disagreed with him—although naturally it allowed him to express his own views.

Behind the scenes we had many prolonged and involved discussions about his articles, my own attitude about Hitler being quite definite and uncompromising; yet these arguments never affected our friendship. Beverley was the victim of his own burning sincerity and belief.

He believes in people. When Hitler said he wanted peace, Beverley believed him. Because Beverley is an honest person—one of the most honest people I have ever known—he believes other people to be equally honest.

I like him enormously. I like his enthusiasm, his 'youthfulness', his open friendliness, and his craftsmanship. He is a professional. Give Beverley a job to do, a sticky article to write, a difficult person to interview, and he will come through every time with the goods.

He has none of the amateur's false pride about an article

that requires to be cut, or lengthened, or even amended. 'Give me ten minutes', he'll say, 'and I'll give you an entirely new opening to that feature.'

Watching him now, passing his hand over his face and looking to me for comfort, I remember some of the highlights of our association.

My mind goes back to the beginning, for instance, when he could scarcely believe that a newspaper would really allow him to say exactly what he liked; to the first night of his revue *Floodlight*, which opened at Blackpool with Frances Day and John Mills and Hermione Baddeley—and the happy party afterwards; to the day he and Frances Day and I went to dear old Gypsy Petulengro's caravan at Harpenden to have our fortunes told, and how Frances and Beverley (old 'Pet' having been wickedly primed by me) staggered out of the caravan, wide-eyed and bewildered, and separately took me aside to tell me that 'Pet' was marvellous (which, in any case, he really was). 'He knows everything about me', Frances said in a slightly stagey awed voice, 'but everything! It's uncanny'; to the sunny days we all spent on the Riviera; to the theatre evenings in London; to the endless discussions about people and ideas and articles—always the articles—to be written.

Yes, I like Beverley.

And someone else whom I like came in to tea, Philip Gibbs.

He came an hour before he had promised to deliver his article, and the article is just too good to be true. Here is another first-rate journalist. We've known each other for over fifteen years and I have never seen him anything but his charming, sincere and helpful self—with a code that nothing can change.

We used to lunch at the Reform Club, and even in the piping days of the mid-1920s, before madmen like Hitler had come to sour the milk in mother's breasts and keep children awake at nights, we wallowed in melancholy prognostication of the march of events—usually after a satisfactory luncheon! I can't now remember why.

Our friendship suffered a little after a most unfortunate occurrence in 1936, for which I was largely to blame.

On a Saturday morning in March, Hitler flung his troops back into the de-militarised Rhineland. Peace hung in the balance, but Hitler cunningly covered this aggressive action with a broadcast 'offer' to the world of 'twenty years of peace' (the first time we had seen this technique in action.)

I telephoned Gibbs, then living in the country, to give him the news and ask him to write a short commentary on it for the next morning's paper. He was out. I left a pretty full message with a servant.

Gibbs came through to me hours later on the phone, very excited, and asked me for all the details of Hitler's 'peace' offer. I ought to have been brighter, but I simply did not jump to the fact that my message hadn't been given to him completely, that he knew nothing of the German invasion of the Rhineland and had only been given by his servant the good news of Hitler's apparently magnanimous 'peace offer'—nor had he listened in to any radio news during the day.

He was enthusiastic, seized on the 'peace offer', coming at a time when the world had been nervous, and wrote his article entirely about Hitler's 'gesture', ignoring the occupation of the Rhineland.

When I read it I thought he had gone off his head; we seemed to be completely at cross purposes, but I thought he was entitled to his point of view, our own differing very widely from his, and published his article. But the misunderstanding was a sad one to both of us. Even if only for a short time.

Now I discuss again with him the job of war correspondent at the Front. He is attracted to the idea, but warns me mildly that 'I'm not quite as young as I was'.

He is a very modest man and continually deprecates himself. We talk of the Great War of 1914-1918. He tells me a lot about Earl Haig that is illuminating.

We get on to talking about Haig through my saying that I hope there will not be in this war the awful frontal attacks and wastage of life there was in the last war. Haig, he says, was not a bit the grim, brutal, unthinking soldier that his square chin and steely eyes suggested.

'He had a shyness that was almost pathological', Gibbs says. 'He was extremely sensitive. He was therefore cut off

from that contact with his men which a great leader should have. He was afraid of meeting people. And although he seemed to condemn thousands to senseless slaughter, he felt it terribly within himself. It really broke him, although few people suspected it. He did not sleep at nights. And of course it wore him down steadily and relentlessly. At the end of the war he was finished, played out.'

Gibbs used to write Haig's weekly communiqués—a longish summing-up of the week's war activities. But Haig wrote his own famous 'Backs to the wall' message, when the German army broke through in March, 1918, although he had his own back to a lovely French Renaissance fireplace at the time, Gibbs tells me.

Haig he described as a fine man, but not a great soldier.

'I wonder what this fellow Gort is like—Tiger Gort as they call him', he smiled. 'I once watched him all evening during dinner to see if I could detect any sign of his military genius, or even any sign of a brain. But not once, by action, look or speech did he betray it. But maybe he'll surprise us.'

Gibbs wonders what will happen in Italy—dare Mussolini go against the will of the people, who hate the Germans? 'The King of the Belgians told me that the hatred was something quite unbelievable', he says.

*Saturday, 9th September, 1939*

Gibbs has made his peace with the Ministry of Information and will be my war correspondent, provided he is passed fit by the doctor.

A letter from Jim Mollison, saying he is trying to get into the Fleet Air Arm. Funny to think of this brilliant pioneering 'lone' flier of the Atlantic having to seek admission into the war. Lately he has been doing a column of gossip for me called 'London Low-down'.

He writes from the Royal Aero Club: 'Dear Jimmy, many thanks indeed for your note received this morning. I only hope there will be a London to 'low down' when the war is over. I today applied for the Fleet Air Arm and await instructions, so in 'case I don't see you for some 'time, remember all's well that ends unwell. Regards.' And he adds

a P.S.: 'After the war will you commission me to write a column which we could caption 'The Inside of the News from the Outside' or alternatively 'I start where the others leave off'?'

Goering's Hymn of Hate against Britain, and the War Cabinet's pronouncement that they expect the war to go on for three years or more. The Ministry of Information asks newspapers not to play it up sensationally.

A hot, sticky, frustrating day and night. No real news—and nothing is so tiresome. To press at 7 p.m., replating till 10.30.

A snack at the Savoy Grill between editions.

Said 'Hello' to young Michael Killanin, now an officer in the Queen's Westminsters.

And then back to my hotel through the gloom at midnight to a lovely hot bath and lots of coffee.

To sleep—exhausted.

## 2

*Sunday, 10th September, 1939*

A WEEK of war. Interesting to see how the Sunday papers treat the Ministry's request not to play up the 'three years war' in headlines. We respect it. So does Reggie Simpson in the *Sunday Graphic*. The others mostly go their own way with sensational headlines.

In any case the B.B.C. gave it out at nine o'clock the previous evening. The 'Information' people are making a mess of it.

Another hot, sticky morning in the office. Waiting, waiting. To hell with more work. There's nothing happening in this war. Home in the afternoon at four o'clock.

Lovely to have tea on the seat facing the lawn, to play with Diana and John, to rake old bonfire ash over the newly-dug vegetable garden, to sit in the quiet, reading and then playing draughts. Rain and wind in the night.

*Monday, 11th September, 1939*

Slept deeply until 10 a.m. There's no 'Monday' morning feeling' for Sunday newspaper people because this is their day off. A heavenly morning, with the Downs fresh and sparkling in the sun after the rain.

Roberts has gone to join the navy. 'I want to do something, sir', he said a couple of days ago. So our staff, Mrs Brault and Roberts, have both gone now. A day cook, Mrs Kennard, has been fixed by Marjorie.



I haul the family off to Seaford, hoping for another swim, but the sea is high and dangerous and the bathe is off.

Seaford is full of evacuated women and children. The beach is busier than usual at this time, and echoes with unfamiliar dialects. But most of the evacuated prefer the town, and throng Woolworth's all day.

Home to lunch—cold lamb and ham, and salad, and afterwards gooseberry fool and cream. I have mine sitting on the seat outside the dining room window.

Afterwards back to Seaford, after phoning the Esplanade Hotel to see how rough the sea is; a lovely swim and tea on the beach.

In the evening meant to take Marjorie to the cinema, which has re-opened in the 'safe' areas, but our car lights went phut on us.

The war news is not so hot. Warsaw looks like falling, the Poles are getting badly knocked; U-boats are sinking lots of ships; and not much is happening in the West.

So far no bombings.

*Tuesday, 12th September, 1939*

Philip Gibbs O.K. for the front. And Anthony—Gibbs' son—came in today to discuss his propaganda job. He has a first-class idea for a film, *The Life of Hitler*. What a documentary that would make!

He put it up to Alexander Korda, who is to do propaganda films for the Government, and Korda is keen. But apparently he has difficulty in getting Government to finance propaganda films. They want the private producer to raise the money.

More casualties in the office through the intense blackout. Keith Briant's eyes blackened and front teeth loosened when his taxi crashed into railings on way to Savage Club.

The Censor has made a mess of it today. Some newspapers come out with the news that British troops have landed and are in action in France. Others withheld story.

Throughout the night the Censor's department tried to catch up on the story, at first released and then withdrawn.

Police officers from Scotland Yard rushed to newspaper offices to stop publication, and to railway stations to stop trains with papers on board.

At 2.15 a.m. the story was finally released. Before that it had been broadcast twice on Paris radio!

A big criticism of Ministry promised for tomorrow in the Commons.

Dinner at Café Royal. The Fergusons came to town today.

*Wednesday, 13th September, 1939*

Warsaw still holding out, Lodz recaptured by Poles, and Germany threatening bombing of open towns.

The hot spell of weather has gone; it is cold and rainy tonight and London is black, gloomy, depressing and yet spectacular—like a fog.

There's nothing to do in evenings, so I started to work on a short story for one of the magazines.

To bed early—missing the country.

*Thursday, 14th September, 1939*

Lunch with Philip Gibbs, to fix details about his war correspondent job. I sat facing the windows. The balloons in the sky made a nice picture for the war talk that went on around us.

Gibbs told stories of his adventures in the Great War—how he started out as free-lance correspondent without official recognition, and frequently had warrants issued for his arrest; how he used to send home his first dispatches by accosting red-braided staff officers going home and asking them to post copy for him to the *Daily Chronicle*! And how, very often, he simply addressed copy to the *Chronicle*, c/o the War Office.

A bit different from this war when we now have to send Gibbs' name as a 'respectable person' to the Newspaper Proprietors Association, who send it to the Ministry of Information, who forward it to the War Office, who then issue the forms to be filled up!

Someone suggests at lunch that Lord Beaverbrook should be Minister of Information.

There is general bewilderment as to the course the war is going to take. Belief that Germany wants to roll up the Poles, then offer peace on her terms, and that France will be tempted to accept.

General puzzlement as to how we can help the Poles. Someone says that two hopes are (a) to launch a great attack on the Western Front within the next few weeks and break the Siegfried line, thus giving us a good grip on Germany before Hitler has finished in Poland, and giving us also a good bargaining counter and a vantage point before winter sets in; and (b) to open up a new theatre of war, such as Rumania; we can then go to Poland through Rumania and through Dardanelles—if Turkey does not weaken further, as now seems likely. Someone will suggest soon that we get at Germany through Alaska!

Italy gr. the fence; Turkey dithering; Russia the enigma; Rumania staying out; America neutral so far—no wonder the so-called man in the street wonders about it all. This war is a guessing game.

The Ministry of Information has so far not told the world about the R.A.F.'s raid on Kiel. The story goes that we sent a hundred and twenty planes over—fighters first, which drew the German fighters into the air and away from our objective as we turned and bolted for home. Then in went our light bombers which drew the fire of the anti-aircraft guns as they turned away also from the target. Finally our heavy bombers went straight for the mark and dropped their eggs.

Reported that two German battleships sunk, that one of our bombers dived straight at the target—bombs, plane and all. If this is all true, why keep it from the world?

There is a good General Gamelin story. When asked what we should do about Italy, Gamelin replied: 'If Italy is neutral, I shall need five divisions just to watch her; if Italy is against us, I shall want ten divisions to beat her; and if Italy is with us, I shall want fifteen divisions to rescue her from defeat.'

Another popular story is that of five British bombers that

set out to throw propaganda leaflets over Germany. Four returned. When the pilots were asked what had happened to the missing fifth, they could not say.

Then, three days later, a tiny speck appeared in the sky. It grew larger, zoomed over the airfield, made a perfect landing—the missing bomber.

When the pilot stepped out, the C.O. said to him: 'Where the hell have *you* been? Missing for three days! You're supposed to have been dropping leaflets over Germany!'

'Dropping them?' said the pilot. 'I've been pushing them through the letter-boxes!'

Beverley Nichols looked in after lunch. In his page for Sunday he is writing the kind of propaganda leaflet *he* would have written. It is much better than the official one. It begins: 'This leaflet might have been a bomb! This leaflet might have killed you!' Effective.

Home in the early evening to the country. Diana and John have received an invitation—O.H.M.S.—to visit the searchlight soldiers in their camp. They are very pleased.

*Friday, 15th September, 1939*

Planted some spinach in the new vegetable patch this morning.

The newspapers carry the story of the Kiel exploit at last. It was to be given on the B.B.C. last night, but the Newspaper Proprietors Association intervened, and all papers carry it today instead.

\* A lovely morning. Fewer trains are now running. I went to Brighton and caught a train to town from there.

By noon the rain was lashing the windows of the office and the balloons looked grey and drab and forlorn in the unfriendly sky. We discussed the similarity of all morning newspapers owing to their policy of abandoning the features and characteristics that previously gave them individuality and going in now mainly for war news. Reggie Simpson agrees with me that Sunday papers should preserve the personality and character to which the public have grown accustomed: plenty of usual features and contributors in

addition to war news—which is so scarce and so censored, and in any case is the same official ‘hand-out’ to all.

A depressing war-time economy drive is now on in the office owing to the smaller newspapers and the fall of advertising revenue. Grim business of laying-off staff going on all over the building and so far the war effort can’t absorb these dismissed people.

I save my conscience, and help my own team, by cutting down their week’s work to a certain number of days, rather than dismissing them altogether. In this way, they will be earning *some* money each week, enough to keep them going till things improve. Jimmy Kirby suffers in this way, and MacInnes, and Fogg.

There are other changes. Young Ronald Howard (Leslie Howard’s son) has already gone off to the war, and Hall-Brown and two other free-lance reporters. Sybil Wettlauffer, the extra secretary, will be off soon, and Michael Geelan, and either Paul Dehn or Keith Briant.

It’s bloody. Only three months ago we were all launched on a great new adventure—the amalgamation of the *Sunday Chronicle* with the *Sunday Referee*. We had just taken over the *Referee*, and merged its circulation with ours.

No one had lost his job through the merger, and the old and new staffs were keyed up with enthusiasm and working willingly and well together. There was an air about the office. It was a joy to be part of something so hopeful, so full of fun and promise.

We were all putting in about twelve to fourteen hours a day on the initial detail work of the new paper, and were certainly short of sleep. But the amalgamation was a success and the secrecy necessary to the success of such a merger had been wonderfully preserved. It had been put through with great skill by everybody concerned, and there was something for us all to work for.

It was a fine team of young, eager men and women and I was lucky to have them. Everything we had waited and worked for was coming our way at last. We had passed the *Sunday Dispatch* in circulation figures and meant to go after the *Sunday Express*. We were doing interesting things.

There was the new Eric Remarque serial, the Gracie Fields life story, the Gibbs articles, the new Show Pages. Fleet Street was talking about us and wondering. There's nothing like competition, and in our office we had the feel of success about us.

Everybody was on his toes and working hard. Every Saturday night was a joy night to see the zeal and loyalty and willing slavery of the boys. Good team-work is an inspiring thing. Even the 'copy' kids felt part of it. The paper was shaping up into a very promising thing.

And now . . . a skeleton war edition of twelve pages. All the plans scrapped, the hopes scuppered, the staff scattering. The happy family breaking up, never again perhaps to work together in this office for the common purpose.

Let me jot down their names now—the future will hold some strange adventures for many of them: Wilf Nolan, Barry Horniblow, Paul Dehn, Keith Briant, Bob Paterson, Wally Moth, Ernest Tapsell, Tom Moore, young George Rogers, Florence Sones, Rushworth Fogg, Andrew Kidd, young Victor Simms, George Collier, 'Wink' Howard, Anthony Gibbs, Betty Nolan, Marjorie Boulton, Jimmy Mellor, Jimmy Kirby, Lavender, Cecil Bear, MacInnes. And that prince of journalists, Herbert Seaman. And in and out of the office all the time, Monica Dickens and Beverley Nichols.

Eight of them have gone already. It's not possible. All their good work down the drain.

Dinner in the evening with Monica Dickens at Café Royal. She's cooking at a Women's Ambulance driver's canteen in Fulham—Lady Annerley is boss. Going out, I met Eric Maschwitz and Jack Davies.

'I'm waiting to get into the Army', said Eric. 'I think it can be wangled! I've got influence!'

Cinemas and theatres re-open, except in an area within a mile-and-a-half of Leicester Square.

*Saturday, 16th September, 1939*

Gloomy opening to a day. A window-cleaner fell from a building in Southampton Row and landed on the pavement

a few yards ahead of me. The sandbags against the wall broke his fall, but the poor fellow was a bit of a mess. Still conscious, he lay twitching in the bright morning sunshine, a grim reminder of the chance that rules our lives.

'It doesn't bear thinking about', said a meek little man to me, when we had seen the window-cleaner into an ambulance. 'He'd have been better killed and out of it all. The trouble that's coming to us all -and just beginning! Looks as if Russia's coming into it, and if you believe the Bible it's going to be Armageddon. It doesn't bear thinking about.'

Nothing like meeting trouble more than half-way. Some people live in Bedlam.

Restless in the forenoon. I phoned the Air Ministry--tired of waiting for the War Office--and tried to get into the R.A.F. They laughed at me.

A busy, clutching-at-straws day. The feeling that Russia is about to do something giving us the lead to the front page. 'Russia. The Riddle.'

A German ultimatum to Warsaw to surrender: and a French repulse with bayonets of a German patrol attack. Are things livening up?

Slipped out to dinner between editions.

Young girls in uniform with subalterns, laughing and drinking beer in the Savoy Grill. It looks as if the atmosphere of the Great War is creeping in again. God help us. What awful things some women in uniform are.

Jim Mollison came into the office to get me to sign his application to join the Air Force. We used to have fun together. Now the famous Atlantic flyer has to use every influence--even mine!--to get into the Air Force. It's certainly an odd war.

I have known Jim many years. He made the first solo Westward flight across the Atlantic in 1932. It was regarded at the time as a 'technical suicide'.

Many people see in this racketting play-boy air-pioneer merely the 'tough guy'. But there is another side to him.

Here is what Mollison says of himself: 'Always when I was a kid I was frightened of the dark. When I went to school I was afraid, and never trusted my school mates. And all

through my flying life I have had to fight against fear.'

I know few men who are more attractive to women than Jim Mollison. I have seen him come alone to a party (and you generally find Jim at parties); and right from the moment of his entrance there began a steady drift of lovelies towards the short, stocky figure in the well-fitting blue suit and the brown suede shoes. •

Jim's eyes lighted up as they came towards him. He likes parties and he likes attractive women.

And do they like him? If you sat with him for a couple of minutes you would know the reason why.

Far from having the rasping voice of the tough guy, Jim Mollison speaks in a soft, persuasive voice. His eyes are bright blue. They glow and fade according to his talk. The flame does not often fade. Jim is mostly always alive, his eyes lighting up as he talks of his plans or tells you stories of his adventures.

Like that story, for instance, of his last lone flight across the Atlantic from New York to England. Jim had been marooned in New York waiting for a favourable weather report. It was winter, and the Atlantic seemed a very long, dark place. He wasn't at all keen on the flight, and he will tell you frankly that he had to do everything he could to overcome his fear.

As the days ticked themselves away Jim became more and more moody and sought distraction in Harry Richman's Broadway night club.

It seemed that the weather could never be favourable, but at long last, in the middle of the night, a message was flashed from the airfield that conditions were not so bad as they had been.

Out of the night club went Jim, straight to the airfield. They helped him into his massive flying suit, big rubber boots, flying helmet and goggles. But a reporter spotted that underneath the overalls was Jim's evening suit, and a few seconds later the message was flashing ahead of him into London: 'Mollison flying to England in evening dress.'

That's Jim Mollison. He takes everything on top. Life for him is a gay adventure, that should begin each day not



earlier than lunch time. He hates to get up early. The morning, he says, was made for the world's workers, and he doesn't pretend for a moment that he is one of the world's workers.

He has always been like that. When he was in the Air Force he made his first forced landing showing off to a girl. He had gone up solo—one of his first solo efforts—and, finding himself in the air in command of a machine, he suddenly remembered the blonde at Girton. Straight away he swooped in the direction of Girton, dizzily dipped over the college, showing off to the waving figures beneath.

Then he found that he didn't know the way home to his airfield. Panic seized him. Round and round he circled, wondering which way to go, and finally he put the machine's nose down and made a terrible landing in a ploughed field. But it had pleased Jim and pleased the girl, and there, in a way, you have his philosophy of life.

He seldom flew unless he was on record-breaking flights. He was not fond of flying in the ordinary way. When he was in London, and he was mostly in London when he was not chasing sunshine in Bermuda or the South of France, he was usually in the company of people who 'did' things—actresses, journalists, writers, big-business men.

But you can seldom get him on the telephone before lunch time. Once I phoned him at twenty minutes past one.

'Oh, hullo', he said. 'I'm just getting up. Let's go and have a bite of lunch together.'

When we met I expected to see a man with a distinct hangover on him from the night before. Any man who got up at one o'clock midday must, I thought, have had a bit of a racket the night before. But Jim was as fresh as paint. His face was brown and shiny with health. His blue eyes were aglow with life.

He was starting his day, out for any adventure that the next twelve hours would bring forth, and with never a thought for tomorrow.

# 3

*Sunday, 17th September, 1939*

**Y**ES, it looks as if Russia is coming in! She's in—with a bang. Her army invaded Poland at dawn this morning, not because Russia is at war, but merely to protect her minorities!

The collapse of international morality is sickening. Britain might have given a lead to the world, with the U.S. in 1931, when America asked us to co-operate in mutual representations to Japan when she seized Manchukuo. Our failure to see what was going on—or to do much about it—led to Italy going for Abyssinia, to Germany seizing the Rhineland, Austria and Czechoslovakia, to Fascist intervention in the Spanish civil war, to our missing the boat when Russia proposed a Peace Conference and collective security, and finally to this insane war.

To remember that eight years ago, when the National Government came into office there wasn't a threat of war in the world that could not have been dealt with! What a record. What a calamity brought about by our supine 'leaders'.

What can all the fools be thinking now who hysterically cheered Chamberlain when he returned from Munich with Hitler's scrap of paper about 'No War with Britain'?

'Peace in Our Time' my foot!

How these leaders have been fooled by the man whose game they were so willing to play.

As one sub-editor said to me last night when we were all talking round the big table between editions: 'A dozen fellows in this office couldn't have managed things so badly.'

But another cynic said: 'No, you're wrong. Anybody can get into a mess, but you've got to be a bloody genius to get into this kind of mess!'

Home in the late afternoon to my lovely home on the hill. The joy of returning to it—the sanity and peace of it!

Mrs Coleman is going back to London with Alan. All the evacuees are going back, fourteen days after the outbreak of war, because there hasn't been an air raid yet.

A beautiful evening. Sheila cut the grass on the drive and I did the edges and hosed the lawn. Was 'stern' with John, who has a cold, for standing up and leaning out of his window, when he had already been warned for the same thing earlier today. I hate doing the heavy father. All men hate it.

The children are growing up, though. Marjorie and Sheila are busy getting things ready for Diana going off for the first time to boarding school. Next Thursday. It will be awful without her. I hope she'll grow up into a saner world.

*Monday, 18th September, 1939*

Played two or three holes of golf at Seaford in the morning.

The news that aircraft carrier *Courageous* has been sunk.

A swim in the late afternoon by myself.

Lord Camrose has been appointed assistant to Lord Macmillan at Ministry of Information. We may get some improvements now. Certainly the war news is pretty grim and people are beginning to realise it.

Russia has joined the German army at Brest Litovsk, and though Poland is holding out, she is cut off completely now. The German Army can now turn its attention westward. What a change in the situation in less than three weeks of war.

*Tuesday, 19th September, 1939*

A lovely morning. A swim—alone in the sea—at Seaford. It's good to steal these moments when one can. The future

lies ahead, uncertain, full of all kinds of possibilities. It is good to feel the sun on your face, the cold sea on your body.

To the office about lunch time.

*Courageous* has lost about six hundred men. Four accompanying destroyers believed to have sunk submarine.

The Fergusons were in town and I took them to the Trocadero in the evening for dinner. Felt rotten, too, for earlier in the afternoon I had to continue the dismal job of parting with more staff.

What a war. Thousands—it must be millions—are being flung out of work at this moment. In the last war, with a million men rushing voluntarily to the colours, workers were difficult to find.

This is the very reverse. You can't just join the Army or Navy, you can hardly get into the Air Force, and until such time as the calling-up notices come out, thousands of men are at a loose end.

This time it was George Collier, my News Editor, one of the very first men with me when I took over the editorship of the *Sunday Chronicle*. I took him as a youth in his teens, fourteen years ago.

In that time he has served me well and faithfully, and risen to success with the paper. It has been difficult many a time for him.

He has not had the cultural or educational background of some of his luckier colleagues; he is small and unprepossessing in appearance, and acutely aware of his deficiencies. Like a lot of small men, he is bumptious sometimes and suffers from an appalling sense of inferiority, so he handles his men a little uncouthly, is always a little unsure of himself.

And yet in his job there are few better men. He is like a little Cockney sparrow. His 'common touch', his understanding of how the great majority live, is the very thing that leads him, nine times out of ten, to get to the heart of the matter. Particularly in crime. George has an instinct with crime stories unrivalled by anyone else in the office. He would have made a first-class detective.

When a crime story breaks George sniffs at it like a dog. His head low over the copy, he soon comes to his decision.

'I bet he's the one', he'll say. While the rest of us argue, George sets about the story his own way, sending out his men according to his 'hunch'.

Next morning he'll come in, having confirmed from somewhere or other his own suspicions. 'They're going to pull him in on a motoring offence', he'll say, his eyes gleaming. 'They haven't got enough evidence on the murder yet. But they will! And until then, he's going to be held!' How often he has been right!

I remember Keith Briant, who edited the *Isis* when he was at Oxford, saying to me: 'I wondered when I first came to you, why you had such an odd fellow as George for News Editor. But I soon realised that he could do what I could never do. I realised that in a newspaper there are different people for different jobs, and that in George you had chosen a very good man for his.'

With Keith and Bob Paterson doing the feature and literary side of the paper, and George the news, I am very well served.

At times George, suffering from his inferiority, gets drunk. Liquor turns him into a Napoleon. He is a little man transformed. His dreams of conquest are dreams no longer. They are realities within his grasp. He talks big. He is a bit of a nuisance, but absorbingly interesting.

We are both fond of boxing, but only once have gone to a big fight together. George asked me to come with him. As we settled ourselves into our ringside seats, George pulling at an outsize cigar, his eyes already glazed, he whispered proudly to me: 'See, boss! Only the best! Ringside seats, big cigar. What a life!'

I have depended upon him many a time, leaned on him, trusted his shrewd judgment. He has been closer to the average newspaper reader than many of the rest of us. And now he has gone.

He took it well, and with understanding. He knows I've saved his skin many a time when other people, wondering at my choice, have mentioned their surprise. He gets six months salary. And he will be back with me again, I hope to God. We shall soon need the people we're getting rid of.

But after fourteen years! It was a bad moment, and found me a little less hard-boiled than I had thought.

Paul Dehn has gone also—to the anti-aircraft battalion of the London Scottish—his duodenal ulcer and all. Lucky Paul, and what a brilliant, willing worker he is.

What a man to have at your shoulder on a hot Saturday night with the news breaking in all direction. He never let me down. You could hand him anything—from a picture caption to a lead story on anti-disestablishmentarianism—not that anyone would ever lead on that! I wonder if newspaper proprietors know what really goes on in their service?

*Wednesday, 20th September, 1939*

Wrote Paul. Tried to work on some fiction to escape from boredom. Too restless and unsettled. Home in the evening for John's birthday tomorrow (he will be seven), and Diana's departure for boarding school. Bought John cricket stumps and bat, Diana a little diary.

*Thursday, 21st September, 1939*

John delighted with his stumps and bat, Diana with her diary. Another swim before going up to London, a little chillier than the previous one. There won't be many more of these. How one grabs at the disappearing delights of peacetime.

Still restless, discontented. Determined to get my head down to work and so in the evening completed a short story. Worked all evening at it in my hotel.

*Friday, 22nd September, 1939*

Sydney Carroll rather foolishly defends Lady Oxford's reference in the *Daily Sketch* to the fact that she often wakes at four o'clock in the morning and reads by lamplight without bothering to draw the curtains and observe the blackout. Many readers had protested by telephone to the *Daily Sketch*.

Carroll takes the attitude that all blackouts are cowardice.

In the evening dined with Keith at the Café Royal and afterwards went back through blackout to my hotel.

Eerie encounter in the dim corridor with a woman in nightdress just coming out of a sleep-walking daze. Got her back to her room and managed to get the porter to make her a pot of tea.

*Saturday, 23rd September, 1939*

Another paper early to press because of black-out. We play up a story that 'Germany is almost ready to make a terrific push on the western Front'. Jimmy Mellor came in in the evening. He is on twenty-four hours special leave before going off somewhere—he thinks Egypt. The office is beginning to be like a regimental depot on Saturday nights with returning warriors dropping in for a drink, unable to stay away from the old enchantment of going to press.

*Sunday, 24th September, 1939*

Lovely to get down to the country. Played cricket and football with John in the evening. Awful to go into Diana's room and find it so deserted. Even the nice smell of her seems to have gone. I hope she is happy at her new school. We all wrote to her in time to catch the evening post.

*Monday, 25th September, 1939*

Another swim on a cool, lovely morning and this one (because I am writing this a few days later) I know to be the last this year. Work in the evening in the garden.

One of the stories going the rounds:

An Army General wanted a new secretary. His A.D.C. suggested that he should have a look at two or three A.T.S. girls.

'And I'll tell you what, sir; we'll give them a psychological test.'

'Psychological humbug', boomed the General. 'Psychology's a big word, but it doesn't mean a thing.'

However, he submitted, and his A.D.C. had three A.T.S. girls sent over and brought in singly for the interview.

'Now', he said to the first, 'listen carefully; what do two and two make?'

'Four', was the prompt answer.

'Thank you', he said. 'Will you wait in the next room?'

And to the second girl: 'What do two and two make?'

She paused, sensing a snag. 'Well, it might be twenty-two', she said tentatively.

'Thank you. Will you please wait next door?'

And to the third girl: 'What do two and two make?'

'Well', she answered slowly, 'it might be twenty-two, it might be four.'

'Thank you very much', and turning triumphantly to his General, 'there you are, sir. That's what psychology does. You see, the first girl said two and two make four. She said the obvious thing. She could see no further than the tip of her nose. The second girl smelt a rat. She said two and two might be twenty-two. The third girl was going to have it both ways. She said two and two might make four, or might make twenty-two. Now, sir, which girl will you have?'

The General did not hesitate.

'I'll have the blonde with the big tits.'

*Tuesday, 26th September, 1939*

Louis Raemakers, the famous Dutch cartoonist of the Great War, has come over from Amsterdam to settle down in London.

I had cabled him about possible war cartoons, and I think this must have helped to decide him. In any case he is afraid the Nazis are going to invade Holland, and that would mean short shrift for anti-Nazi people like Raemakers..

The feeling in Holland, he says, is that Hitler will attack through Holland, and not Belgium ('they will buy off Belgium in some way') and so they will fight an isolated action in Holland, the Allies not being able to get at them through Belgium on their left flank.

Raemakers willing to do cartoons. He tells me that for



all the fame and success of his Great War cartoons he has now very little money. Looks as though I might bag him for the paper.

Dinner with Marjorie. Afterwards walked back to hotel in the beautiful clear moonlight, the balloons glinting in the sky like large stars. I should think it's the first time in the experience of Londoners that they have been able to see their shadows by moonlight on the London streets.

And how lovely London is by moonlight. Here is one of the real blessings of the blackout. It is like walking in a strange cool fairy city, the tops of the buildings gleaming with light, their bases plunged in deep blue shadow.

Met Gilbert Frankau again during dinner. He is in the German section of Intelligence at the Air Ministry. When I told him I wanted to get into something, he promised to let me meet a High-Up at the Ministry in the morning.

Is my luck changing? Gilbert says the usual thing about being much too useful running a newspaper, and reminds me that with his now 12s. a day he has to make a delicate decision each day whether he will eat at Lyons or the A.B.C.

# 4

*Wednesday, 27th September, 1939*

A DAY of odd experiences and pictures—pictures on my mind that will live for a long time. Gilbert Frankau phoned and asked me to present myself at the Air Ministry at 11.45 a.m.—‘on the dot’.

I got a hair-cut first, a closer one than usual so that I should look more like a fighting man, and was at the Ministry ‘on the dot’.

Four men paid little attention to me in the enquiry room. They had some knotty problem to discuss. When I announced that I wanted to see Flying-Officer Frankau in Room 79, one of them asked me where it was.

‘You tell me’, I suggested. ‘That’s where I want to get to, anyway.’

An interested discussion followed between the four. I tried to help them by saying the room was Intelligence, German Section. It didn’t seem to mean much.

Finally they looked into a notebook, discovered the whereabouts of Room 79, explained that so many things were happening, so many new people and rooms were coming into existence, that it was all a bit confusing, and one of them escorted me there. (Up in the lift, past the attendant who looked after the cigarette and chocolate hoard for the Department!)

When I went into Gilbert’s room a monosled officer was cleaning his buttons. Gilbert was making notes on a memo pad.

I went round his desk, curious, to see what they were. I

could read them easily, unless they happened to be a code. Whisky . . . razor blades . . . shaving cream.

On the desk in front of Gilbert was a typed letter. He had pinned it down with a drawing pin, so it was evidently important. It was. It was a letter from a firm of solicitors reminding Gilbert about an overdue payment for some personal transaction.

He took me through innumerable corridors to someone else's department to see a very nice young chap, whom I liked at once. He did not wear a uniform.

He rose, looking keenly at me. Gilbert said tactfully, 'Well, I'll be getting back to my own show', and went out.

What followed was something I had not bargained for. I saw that at last I was getting near the war, but not in the way I had expected.

In a few minutes my new friend said: 'Well, I think I know a sensible man when I see him.'

He then locked the door. 'This is it, I thought. I'm going to be a spy or something! For the next hour we stood close together in the middle of the room, he doing most of the talking.

And as he talked, my heart sank because I quickly saw the drift of his remarks. He told me nothing that I did not already know, but I began to see that I was not going to get into the Air Force after all. Not yet, anyhow. The Air Force might certainly use me, but not in a way that differed greatly from my usual way of life.

After a general survey of the war situation, my new friend said in effect: 'We have nothing to fear on the sea, because Germany has no real navy. We can never be threatened on land, so the army doesn't need first claim on supplies. But in the air we are vulnerable! We should have concentrated on bringing up our air strength. We neglected it.'

He picked up several newspapers, drawing my attention to blue-pencilled flapdoodle about 'our air superiority' and kindred nonsense. I knew the kind of stuff and the people who wrote it.

'That's just fooling the public', he said warmly. 'Wait till our ports and harbours are bombed, as they will be bombed,

and people will wake up then. It's a few newspaper chaps like yourself we need to give the public a lead on matters like this and sound a warning and offset this bunk!

He mentions that the Ministry, like all the other Ministries, is beginning to fill up with all kinds of dead-heads—the daughter of Lord This and the son of Lord That.

It was the same in the last war, when there was a howl of wrath from everyone concerned when the swarms of useless people were, finally, turfed out. They're seldom disturbed when things are right, but when things begin to go wrong someone has to take action.

When he asks me what I want to do, and I tell him that it would be fun and (I think) important to write up the R.A.F. as I think it should be written up—from the inside—and that I might even learn to fly in the process, he says: 'Here you would be tied-up, submerged. You'd have to conform to red-tape. You'd be hamstrung. In your present job you are free to help us. Stay where you are, I do urge you. You are much more useful to us helping to get the things done that will need to be done.'

I know he's right, when I face up to it, but like millions of other men I want to break out into a new kind of life connected with the war. Of course I want to 'escape'. Who doesn't? War is the great escape for millions of people who have no other hope of ever breaking out of the rut. To be able to get away from all ordinary responsibilities and to be a 'hero' in the process is really something.

The interview depresses me. Later we fall to talking about the incidentals of all big departments, the overlapping, the intrigue, the pettiness, the jealousy—all the things that one foolishly imagines disappear when men are joined in a common cause. Men don't appear to change, whatever the cause.

When I go out and along the corridors and rejoin Gilbert, he goes with me to the door.

'Thanks for nothing', I say shortly to him.

'You'll need the pink form you filled in when you came in in order to get out', he says.

Like hell I did. I walked past the army of people at the door with the pink form in my pocket, and all they did

was salute me! That was the final ironical touch. It must have been my close hair-cut that did it.

Straight to the Savoy Grill to lunch with Elsie Cooper. Chatted with Jock Munro for a minute. We laugh over the Ministry of Information, and the news elicited in Parliament that it now employs nine hundred and ninety-nine people, of whom forty-three are journalists. I begin to see what the people at the Air Ministry are up against.

Tripe and onions for lunch, and a flan with peaches and cream afterwards. And coffee.

'Why don't they ration food right from the beginning?' Elsie asks. 'At least it would help to bring home the equality of war if nothing else.'

Walked in Hyde Park for a few minutes afterwards before going back to the grind. Cold and windy and clear, with the balloons high in the sky.

A letter from Lord Camrose, my old chief, and now Assistant to the Ministry of Information, in answer to one I had written him.

My letter to him said:

19th September, 1939.

Dear Lord Camrose,

What the people need at the moment—the people of Britain as well as of other countries—is a steady flow of stimulating news about every possible British war activity—air, naval and land.

This is no news to you, of course, but it seems to have been completely overlooked hitherto by the people at the Ministry of Information. To a newspaper editor with some knowledge of mass psychology, it seems positively criminal that news of exploits like the bombing of Kiel should not have been released instantly, and should not have been treated expertly to exploit every possible bit of value in it.

• There must be a dozen good *heartening* stories available every day if the machinery exists to initiate and sift them and then to give them to the world as we do in our business—with the minimum loss of time and the maximum punch behind them. •

The department seems dreadfully in danger of forgetting that we are at war, and that in war the question of *time*

is a very important factor, and encouragement is an absolute necessity.

This is what Lord Camrose wrote in reply:

Ministry of Information,  
Senate House,  
London University Building,  
Malet Street, W.C.1.  
September 25th, 1939.

Dear Drawbell,

Thank you for your letter. You all seem to be under the impression that this Ministry is in a position to give you a flow of stimulating news about the British war activity although the Ministry can do nothing of the sort. The three Services have the matter in their own hands, and while we are pushing them hard, they cannot be pushed beyond a certain point.

I only wish there were the dozen good stories which you talk of and which we were free in the military sense to give.

Come and see me sometime. I am afraid you have got an entirely wrong conception of the powers and duties of this Ministry.

Yours sincerely,  
CAMROSE.

And a message from Winston Churchill, now First Lord of the Admiralty. I had suggested making four good war articles by putting together excerpts from his *World Crisis* and publishing them in the paper. Churchill agrees and would like to see them and me at the Admiralty.

(*Note written later:* I had had a very happy journalistic association with Mr Churchill. I had published articles by him as often as I could get them, right from the moment when I had become an editor.

In the nineteen-twenties and in the mid-thirties, when he was out in the political wilderness and sounding those warnings about the future that went unheeded in so many quarters, I had suggested that a very good newspaper series of personal reminiscences might be put together by skilfully 'milking' his earlier books.

Mr Churchill, at first a little dubious, was won over by the very able selection and handling of the material by my two assistants, Bob Paterson and Keith Briant, and agreed. The series appeared under the title *My Life and Times* and an

editorial preface made it clear that the articles were from Mr Churchill's early books. So popular was the feature that we continued to go back again and again to Mr Churchill's books (there was abundant material to draw from) and publish fresh series of articles.

As the experiment had been successful in peace time, it seemed to me that we might now begin to tap such wonderful war material as would certainly be available in Mr Churchill's Great War book, *World Crisis*.)

I go round to the Admiralty about 7.30 p.m. just as dusk is closing in on London. How different the Admiralty is from the Air Ministry, and how good and fitting that I should be acquainted with the sharp contrast on the same day.

The Air Ministry had had all the marks of a junior organisation as yet unproved. The Admiralty is crisp and streamlined and somehow like a battleship itself. Here is tradition and the confident usage of centuries.

I go down a long, long corridor, catching glimpses of naval officers through open doors.

The passage is dimly lit, the lamps having blue shades. I wait for a few minutes in a waiting room which has been pressed into service as an emergency bedroom. Three camp beds fill the floor space. Two thick dressing-gowns hang from the coat pegs.

On the walls pictures of ships, a photograph of a train taking oil fuel to the fleet—'the first time in history'—a map of Scapa Flow. Dispatch boxes against a wall, black and red. The black ones wear a white-painted inscription, 'A. J. Balfour, M.P.'. On the tables, navy magazines, British Empire pamphlets, two books—*Toward the League of Nations Idea*.

What an idea! If the League of Nations had been properly backed by this same British Empire we might not now be in this war.

Something of this is perhaps in Churchill's mind when I say to him, reminding him of our luncheon conversation at his house in Westerham, 'Well, we both said it would come', and he answers huskily, looking up sharply at me: 'It should never have happened. It could have been stopped. It *should* have been stopped.'

Which is what we all know. Anyone with half an eye saw it coming five years ago. Everyone with any sense of reality knew it for a certainty when we let Hitler get away with his entry into the Rhineland three years ago. But the Government played Hitler's game, believed in him to the last, closed its eyes to the most flagrant breaches of faith—and we shall pay for it.

I am with Churchill in the First Lord's room, startling with colour from the numerous chairs in gay pillar-box red leather. The First Lord is smoking the eternal cigar; a whisky decanter is half-empty on a table; he moves about the vast room in comfortable carpet slippers.

He looks in a fighting mood. A few hours before he has told the House about an engagement in the North Sea in which Germany has attacked our ships with twenty planes and lost two.

We discuss our business and dispose of it, and I ask him will there be peace?—this false peace that is shortly going to be offered us and that so many people seem strangely to believe in.

'No', he says definitely. 'Oh, no. There will be no premature peace. What guarantee would we have from the fellow that would be worth anything? Oh, no, we're going on.'

I say tentatively that I think on the whole our situation isn't as hopeless as some people think. This launches him on a panoramic page of some future book of his, and it is a joy to listen to his hoarse voice and see the mettle in his eye.

... 'Hopeless? By no means. It is very hopeful. We have been in much tighter corners. When you think of our situation in 1917, with a powerful German navy always a potential menace, with the U-boats almost succeeding in starving us out, with Russia tumbled into chaos and defeat, with Italy tottering, and a situation gathering force that was to lead to the break through of the German armies on the Western Front in early 1918, you will realise that we are in a more hopeful position now than then. We have much to be thankful for, more perhaps than we deserve.'

And so on, in his own wonderful strain. I listen entranced.



It has been a long, tiring day. What a delightful way to end it.

Later I tell him about Louis Raemakers' cartoon of him smoking a cigar, which Raemakers has made a submarine.

'I'd like that', says Churchill. 'May I have the original?'

It is the night of the 7s. 6d. in the £ taxation Budget.

A late dinner with Keith to tell him about our new arrangements, with Churchill and the work to be done tomorrow.

To bed with Noel Coward's *To Step Aside*—a delightful book of short stories. What a versatile person Coward is, and how capable.

# 5

*Thursday, 28th September, 1939*

ANOTHER good story of the black-out. A man who had picked up a tart in the dark asked her curiously how things were these days. Wasn't business bad? he queried, peering into the gloom to see what she looked like. 'Oh', she whispered, 'what with this and my old-age pension I can just eke out a living!'

*Friday, 29th September, 1939*

Just before lunch a boy came in from Leeds. He had studied art at the Leeds College of Art. He brought with him some specimens of his work.

His name is Gordon Horner. He is twenty-four, and his work is vigorous in conception and imaginative in treatment. He has a flair for military subjects.

I am impressed by his work, and, showing it round the office, someone remarks on the similarity to Caton Woodville.

I suggest to him that he should do artist's impressions of dramatic war events, e.g. The raid on Kiel.

Lunch-time discussion centres round the new Nazi-Soviet peace 'threat' to the rest of the world. General agreement that there can be no talk of peace while Hitler and Stálin carve up Poland between them. Philip Gibbs writes a stinging article for me on the subject.

In the evening to the Café Royal. A drink in the bar with Jack Davies before Keith arrives. Fred Thompson is there

and Bill Mollison, the theatrical producer, and a couple of show girls.

My sympathy goes out to the theatre people. They are having a thin time of it just now with all London theatres closed at 6 p.m.

Jack Davies tells me that Eric Maschwitz has got an appointment. A censor of letters in Liverpool, at £4 a week!

Nine hundred and ninety-nine well-paid people at the Ministry of Information, and Eric Maschwitz, that brilliant young writer, gets shoved off to Liverpool to censor letters. Talent wasted while Whitehall runs amok.

Eric, who had been fourteen years at the B.B.C. and received an O.B.E. for his services, wrote offering himself to the B.B.C. But there was nothing there, apparently, and so another good man, eager to do something to help, takes on any job he can get.

In spite of the slump, Bill Mollison says: 'No bloody peace at any price. I'd sooner be bombed or live in a shack than have peace now on their terms!' That's the stuff to give them.

A very good Low cartoon in the *Evening Standard* shows Hitler, Ribbentrop, Goering and Goebbels standing on the tarmac at Munich airfield.

All are in uniform, Hitler carrying in his belt the 'Nazi-Soviet Peace Terms'. And all look anxiously through binoculars up into the sky. The caption is 'What! No Umbrella Yet?'

There will be no Chamberlain flying with his umbrella to meet Hitler this time.

Walked back to the hotel under a full moon. A lovely evening, London looking beautiful in the cold moonlight. But—with the long spell of rainless weather—the drains of this old city begin to smell like hell. We want a deluge. We look like getting it when this war starts—about next Tuesday.

*Saturday, 30th September, 1939*

Gordon Horner comes in to see me. The R.A.F. have raided Heligoland (we are said to have lost five planes), so I get him to do a graphic picture of it for the back page.

He does a fine job; his knowledge of planes and ships and military things is really unique, and his craftsmanship first-rate.

He is a nice young man, extremely naïve, and amuses me by telling me he went to the Windmill Theatre the previous afternoon.

'I've been to Paris', he says, 'and seen the *Folies Bergères*, and I thought I was a man of the world, but gosh, the Windmill show made me think differently.'

I've offered him a job on the paper.

Raemakers came in. His first cartoon to the *Amsterdam de Telegraaf* was held up by the Post Office. I get it passed by Censor and make better arrangements for future cartoons. It's a good cartoon and I put it on the front page: 'Stalin's Ally'. It shows Stalin laughing and dancing with the skeleton figure of Death.

Berlin radio announces that U-boats will sink on sight. We lead the paper on it. Not such a good day. The sub-editors are slow for once, and there is little news.

The first Churchill article reads very well, and looks well.

I go out to the Savoy Grill, after the 7 o'clock edition. Talk with John Gordon of the *Sunday Express*, and Pamela Frankau and Humbert Wolfe, and Jack Davies and Eric Maschwitz.

*Sunday, 1st October, 1939*

Going down to country, run into Air-Commodore Groves, whom I haven't seen for ages, travelling on same train.

He is going to Cooden to join his wife for the day and show his seven-years-old son his 'war paint', as he calls his Air Force uniform. His chest is stiff with ribbons.

We secure an empty first-class compartment to ourselves and talk nearly all the way, but Groves is tight-lipped about the present situation as one would know him to be.

Groves always fought for the air arm. He traces the beginning of the war to our lack of long-range bombers stationed in Egypt at the time of the Italian-Abyssinian adventures. Mussolini would never have defied us as he did

('he laughed at our Navy, but he wouldn't have laughed at bombers'), and so he wouldn't have been thrown into Hitler's arms; and the march of aggression might have been stopped. Groves is, like all Air Force men, sad about our decline from second world air power at the end of the last war to fifth now.

Nice to get home and see Diana again, home from school for the week-end. She has a slight cold. Walk with Marjorie. Football with John. Rain at last.

Played noughts and crosses and Squares with both children, and then had our home cinema in the evening—a nostalgic film showing us all climbing North Berwick Law just a few days before the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact made it absolutely clear that war was inevitable.

Churchill on the wireless. Excellent. 'It was for Hitler to say when the war would begin; but it is not for him or his successors to say when it will end. It began when he wanted it, and it will end only when we are convinced he has had enough.'

*Monday, 2nd October, 1939*

Slept badly and late, but woke at 7.30 a.m. to say 'Hello' and 'Good-bye' to Diana going off to school.

Worked in garden. Played football and cricket with John before tea. We both worked in garden afterwards.

Until 9 p.m.—wireless news hour—it was possible to forget the war. How remote it all seems on this peaceful hill. A beautiful day, deep comforting silence all over the countryside. In the evening, a lovely three-quarter moon.

And then the news that R.A.F. planes had flown over Berlin and dropped leaflets.

And when one puts one's head on the pillow the brain begins again. That is the trouble. In my work now there is no alternative to war. It is the news all the time. There is nothing else.

As Paul Dehn said, back in the office on his first leave, 'The best way to get away from the war is to be in the Army. You just don't have to think.'

*Tuesday, 3rd October, 1939*

George Bilainkin wanted me to lunch with several friends of his from the Embassies, but I was booked to Drysdale and so had to decline.

At tea, a tedious two-hour conversation with Raemakers and Sydney Carroll of the *Daily Sketch*—all on Carroll's account—trying to get Raemakers to do cartoons for the *Daily Sketch* as well as for me.

Raemakers has grown used to the idea of being 'wanted' again, and hopes for an official Government appointment. However, in the end I managed to arrange it.

*Wednesday, 4th October, 1939*

Lunch with Cecil Mattingley. She wants me to do a serial for her magazine but it does not seem quite my cup of tea just now, and we leave the subject.

She has come up from somewhere in Bucks, where some of the editorial staffs of periodicals and magazines have been transferred for safety. There are other evacuated people in the district and Cecil talks amusingly of the boredom of some of them, of their dislike of the country, and of their inability to find any amusement in anything but drinks and binges.

'Was the last war like this?' she asks. 'Did everybody go in for drinking?'

I assure her they mostly did.

'But these people just sit around and drink', she tells me. 'If they were gay as a result, if the conversation were witty and scintillating, it would be something. But they are just dull—sitting drinking solidly.'

Paul Dehn comes in in the afternoon, wearing a very un-warlike kit, trousers of hoden grey (he is in the London Scottish) with a black glengarry. He looks like something out of Ruritania, or Gilbert and Sullivan, but assures me that it is the peace-time regulation 'walking-out dress'.

The Army doesn't seem to change. He got up this morning at 5.45 and before breakfast had been on fatigues that

made him scrub and clean out huts, cookhouses, latrines and God only knows what else.

He tells me that the language is just the same, every second word sounding like fugging. The result is that when one is really annoyed, according to Paul, words do indeed fail to express varied emotion, and one is left beating at the air and murmuring 'bother'.

But he says they are all good chaps on his anti-aircraft station and only a nuisance when someone gives the warning about a foreign aircraft and it turns out to be a seagull.

And hard on his heels comes Donald McCullough, smart in his Flight-Lieutenant's uniform of the R.A.F.—with an I.C. on his right sleeve, which I suggest should be I.C.I. (Imperial Chemical Industries).

He also is warm on the subject of propaganda. He goes round the different Air Force units trying to get stories, and finds the intelligent people naturally playing always for secrecy at the expense of publicity and propaganda.

A message from Philip Gibbs that his wife is so ill he feels compelled to withdraw from his war correspondent post *pro tem* and nominates his son, Tony, in his place.

Things are looking up with the advertisements in the paper, and we are now fourteen instead of twelve pages. 'Business as usual.'

But I work too hard this early evening and go to bed too soon and sleep badly. It is difficult in London to break from one's work, or to find sufficient diversion in black-out evenings to relieve the mind from the continuing daily pre-occupations. This is now the common experience. Everybody talks about being 'bored', 'stale', 'tired'.

*Thursday, 5th October, 1939*

Long discussion with Ræmakers. He seems not to want to commit himself to too strenuous a working life and would like to adjust the arrangement with the *Daily Sketch*, although willing to continue his personal agreement with me.

Saw Lord Camrose at the Ministry of Information. We have a long friendly chat about the functions of the Ministry and he shows by his shrewd comments that—as always—he knows what is going on in the newspapers.

He has aged very little since that day fourteen years ago when he appointed me Editor of his newspaper *The Sunday Chronicle*. I was twenty-six then, and the notes I made of my very first interview with him show what a fortunate young man I was. They have their place here as an echo from another world:

My interview on this fateful morning is with one of those two remarkable Berry brothers (who became Viscount Camrose and Viscount Kemsley,) and who a short time before had acquired control of Allied Newspapers (now Kemsley Newspapers). My interview is for ten o'clock, and on the first stroke of the hour I am shown into Lord Camrose's room, and so find once more confirmation of what I have always experienced: that, contrary to all those film versions of a hectic Big Business which leaves its executives nervous wrecks and their office arrangements in chaos, the man at the top is in tranquil control of himself, and when he says ten o'clock he means ten o'clock—for you and for him.

'Oh, hello', Lord Camrose says quietly. 'Come and sit down.'

He rises from his desk and holds out his hand. There is a smile in his friendly eyes, a flower in his lapel, and a sense of confidence and authority about him that give me an immense reassurance. Suddenly I know it will be all right.

He reaches for the cigarettes on his desk.

'Will you smoke?'

His voice is soft and pleasant. I smile back at him, and I see now that the friendly eyes are shrewd and quizzical. They miss precious little, I think.

Then my heart gives a bound, for on the desk in front of him is a folded newspaper—the cause of this interview, the big hope in my heart.

He taps it now lightly with his finger.

'Mr Heywood has been telling me about this idea of yours', he says.

Mr Heywood is H. N. Heywood, Editor-in-Chief of Allied Newspapers. To him I had previously outlined a plan for a new kind of *Sunday Chronicle* (one of the papers owned by the group), drawn up a 'dummy' of the new paper as I conceived it, and found him to be enthusiastic. He had passed the idea



along to Lord Camrose, and this interview was the result. At that time the paper was without an editor.

The man on the other side of the desk turns the pages of the paper. I know very well that, being the man he is, he has already studied them carefully.

'Very interesting', he murmurs.

I wait. It's up to him.

He gives me a swift upward glance. I believe it to be friendly.

'Tell me more about the idea as you see it', he urges.

Well, that's just what I am longing to do. But before I can open my mouth the telephone bell rings.

He murmurs an apology and lifts the receivers.

'Hello', he says and listens to the voice at the other end.

It looks like being a long session. He turns his eyes away from the instrument in my direction and registers a renewed apology for the interruption.

I get up from my chair. I want to show him that I don't want to overhear anything; but also I want to try to get some clue to him from his own room. Perhaps his books or his pictures, or some article of furniture, will tell me something more about him and establish a common meeting-ground in addition to the newspaper lying on his desk.

So I go casually away from the desk and drift to the bookcase against one of the walls.

My eyes scan the titles along the top shelf, then drop to the second shelf. Then, a little startled, they switch quickly back to the top shelf.

I glance back, puzzled, at the man speaking in his soft, assured way into the telephone. Slowly I turn and try the third bookshelf. And again I am surprised.

Well, Lord Camrose has certainly given me some kind of opening!

I take down from the top shelf a copy of T. W. H. Crosland's *The Unspeakable Scot*. My hand goes to the shelf beneath and, a little mournfully, I collect another copy of T. W. H. Crosland's *The Unspeakable Scot*. From the third shelf I withdraw a third copy of T. W. H. Crosland's *The Unspeakable Scot*.

Three copies of the same book in the bookcase of the man you hope is going to make you an editor! Not bad going—if you don't happen to be a Scot!

I wonder if you know the book? Crosland, that erratic, unhappy and brilliant man, hated Scotsmen with a concentrated fury that was frightening to witness. He lost all control of himself on the subject of the Scot. Earlier in my career I had come across him. An editor for whom I 'subbed' copy had made me change the word, 'England' to 'Britain' in Crosland's weekly article. Crosland appeared at the office, demanded an

explanation of the editor, who passed the irate contributor pleasantly on to me as the culprit. It was a rare experience to hear Crosland let himself go.

My eyes go back to the friendly-looking man still engaged in his telephone conversation. The whole shape of my life is being decided at this interview, but I am too young to appreciate this fact fully. At twenty-six life is sure and sweet and unending. You are concerned only with the immediate. The effects that will spring from your actions are only dimly perceived—if at all.

Still, I am old enough to appreciate that three copies of *The Unspeakable Scot* are an odd kind of omen!

The telephone talk ends. Lord Camrose looks up. He sees the books in my hand.

I put them on the table in front of him.

'This looks pretty ominous for me', I say.

He picks them up. He smiles.

'I gather you're a Scotsman?' he says. 'Well, we'll see if we can overlook it! Now, this idea of yours. Tell me——'

I tell him as best I can. At the end of it, he says easily:

'Well, you'd better get on with it! You know what you want to do. Go ahead and do it!'

And as I put the Crosland books back on the shelves, he adds: 'And I think I'd forget all about these.'

But I never forgot. Years afterwards I asked Lord Camrose *why* he had three copies of that particular book. I suggested that it was probably to keep his young Scotsmen in their place. 'No,' he replied. 'That's an ingenious idea, and the books may actually have served that purpose, but I can't say it occurred to me. I confess that I really can't tell why I had three copies of the book. I was very friendly with Crosland, and it may be that before the 1914-1918 war I published a reprint of the book for him. I hardly think that's the right reason, though, and I do know he had a knack of presenting me with copies of his various books whenever he was feeling appreciative of something I had done for him; but if you knew Crosland at all, this would not have happened too many times!'

Went to see the film, *Beau Geste*, in the evening. Gary Cooper in it. The newspapers and cinema people have been kicking up a row to keep cinemas and theatres open to

cheer people up. This cinema, outside the restricted one-and-a-half miles from Leicester Square, was open until 10 p.m.

There were about a hundred people in it. The film would be grand for any boy up to fourteen. But at any rate it's a move in the right direction.

# 6

*Friday, 6th October, 1939*

WALKED in the park in the morning. N.C.O.s' squad being drilled by Regimental Sergeant-major. The same old stuff. A great deal of shouting.

Hitler's 'Peace' speech started coming in during lunch and led to a spirited discussion among us.

As the nature of the speech became clear, someone raised the old bogey that Hitler was keeping out Communism and that we might as well make peace now to save ourselves from ultimate Communism. The others set about him, and later the evening papers reflected our attitude.

Jimmy Hodson to tea.

To a film in the evening about the dancing life of Mr and Mrs Vernon Castle, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Puerile stuff, with another hundred people having been lured there out of the gloom outside.

*Saturday, 7th October, 1939*

Walked in park before going to office. Decided to leave after the first edition had gone to press and have quiet week-end in the country. My tummy has got its usual once-a-year ferret in it. All journalists have stomachs. Occupational disease. A good paper, with Beverly Nichols, Churchill, 'Sapper', Anthony Gibbs all in it.

But little news--although it looks as if the war might really start soon! Left for home in the evening about eight o'clock.

*Sunday, 8th October, 1939*

A lovely quiet day with family, cricket and football with Diana and John and Sheila on Janson's field.

A drink in the morning with officers from the searchlight squad on our land. No news.

*Monday, 9th October, 1939*

Diana crept in in the morning to kiss me good-bye before going off to school. It's lovely to see her grow up into a definite personality, beginning to lean on herself. We had Noughts and Crosses and Squares---she, John and I the night before---and it's fun to be out of gloomy London and feel a family around you, particularly at this time.

Torrents of rain. Worked down the lane, clearing the gulleys for water streaming down from the hill. Soaked to the skin, but very satisfying, especially with a hot bath after it. But God knows what it is like for the soldiers on the hill. Most of them now drop in for a drink or a bath and use our home, quite properly, as a get-away from their huts.

Philip Gibbs' wife died on Saturday, after eight of the fourteen days given her by the specialist. Tony is off to the front tomorrow in place of his father, who will follow in a fortnight's time.

*Tuesday, 10th October, 1939*

Have been reading George Simenon's Inspector Maigret detective stories. These, printed in English for the first time, are obviously the goods, so I bought two of them to run as serials in the paper.

What fun it is to have the privilege of introducing a million people to a worthwhile new book, especially one to take their minds off the boredom of this kind of war. I've been very lucky in choosing some good stuff in the past---the first serialisation of Cronin's *Hatter's Castle*, Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel*, Axel Munthe's *San Michele*, and a number of others all destined to become fabulous sellers.

Its good to remember them now, when one has so little scope in newspapers.

Drysdale told me a story when I mentioned to him that I would be interested to see what my reaction today would be to shell-fire.

Hitler, the story goes, was flying over the lines when he heard a gun go pop.

'Let me down at once', he said to the pilot.

'I can't do that here', answered the pilot.

'But you must', said Hitler. 'I have something very urgent to do!'

'Do it in your hat', suggested the pilot, 'and throw it over the side.'

Hitler did.

The next day the French war communiqué announced:

'We have found Hitler's hat and his brains, but no trace yet of the rest of the body.'

*Wednesday, 11th October, 1939*

Walked in the park in the lovely morning.

In the evening through a sodden night and pitch blackness to the Palladium for half-an-hour to see the Crazy Gang—Nervo and Knox, Flanagan and Allen—at their clowning. A rough show, enjoyed by a packed, war-bored audience.

Read Graham Greene's *Confidential Agent*. First-rate thriller with good psychological understanding.

*Thursday, 12th October, 1939*

Louis Raemakers came in to the office. Does not want to commit himself too deeply. He is a difficult person to bargain with, but he proved himself an excellent actor and entertained me with stories of his early life in Holland and Germany. He has a deep and abiding distrust of the German.

Lunch with Wilf Nolan, who tells me he has just bought more Compton Webb shares. As the firm is making uniforms, and the price is low, it looks like a good buy. War!

In the afternoon Chamberlain says his big 'No' to Hitler's peace offer and this time he makes the speech he should have made long ago. The House cheers, visitors joining in with enthusiasm.

Looks as though the war is on at last.

Got out of London and went home to the country in the evening in an over-crowded and dimly lit train. A still, clear night. The bright searchlights sweep the sky from the site on our hill. Inside we put on the Delius record 'On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring', and Dvorak's 'New World' Symphony, and the slow movement of Grieg's Piano Concerto.

*Friday, 13th October, 1939*

Looks like being another good paper on Sunday, with Beverley Nichols, Winston Churchill, Philip Gibbs, 'Sapper', Simenon, Racemakers. Talent at least, if no news.

Train crowded to town. Evacuees are pouring back. The war's over, they think.

At lunch with Hore-Belisha (War Minister) some idiot started the ball rolling by trying to get Hore-Belisha to visualise the possibility of a future conflict with Russia. H.-B. quite rightly refused to do this, pointing out that everything that had happened was fortunate for us, that Russia in effect was an ally of ours because, while looking after her own interests, she was playing our game in the East.

He would not be drawn from the main point, which is that we are at war with Germany, and it is Germany we have to defeat. I wish some other people were as level-headed.

He listened patiently as we mentioned our own reports: that the Germans will attack in the West quite soon (probably through southern Belgium); that Gamelin expects the attack on Sunday; that eighty German divisions have been assembled on the Western Front and the expectation among soldiers is that Germany will attempt the same tactics as in Poland—advance of tanks and bombers to over-run front line and

machine-gun resistance—penetration in depth—more tanks and bombers—more tanks and bombers.

‘When it does come’, says H.-B. grimly, ‘it will certainly be by that method.’

With one eye on the War Minister, we show that we know the Belgians have no real line of defence and have steadily refused to prepare such a line in case they offend Germany; that they will not even, in their own interests, lend themselves to the flimsiest of staff talks with us; that the King of the Belgians is very definite in his attitude; that they look like making the same mistake as the Poles, who had no defence line prepared and who depended for defence on cavalry and an air force that co-operated inadequately with the army.

But Hore-Belisha smilingly refuses to be drawn.

On one point, however, he gives his views, and it would be odd if, as War Minister, he held other views. But it is difficult to know how much he is speaking for himself and how much for the Service that he administers. He eloquently condemns our ‘independent’ Air Force.

He advocates the well-known army doctrine that planes are part of the army, just as tanks are and motor vehicles. He urges—with quiet force, his hands making pleading pendulums of motion as he talks—that it is foolish to send on reconnaissance flights airmen with little military knowledge.

‘They do not know what they are looking at’, he says. ‘An Air Force observer will report that he has seen “a lot of soldiers about”, but a trained soldier would report that he had seen three battalions of infantry, or a battery of medium artillery; this information would be of definite value to us.’

He resents that an army chief has to ask for the use of planes from the Air Force. The German Air Force is under the command of the army and works with the army.

Every Air Force in the world, H.-B. says, is in the same position, except ours. Ours is all over the place, one day taking photos, the next bombing Kiel, the next dropping leaflets on Germany.



Well, maybe he is right; but I don't altogether agree with him. Time will tell.

At the end of lunch I toss him the letter I received from him a year ago—at the time of the Munich crisis—thanking me for my offer of service and saying he'd make use of it if anything happened. He promises to do something now.

A hellish afternoon. Philip Gibbs turns in a hell of an article wanting an alliance with Germany against Russia! What has happened to some people in this country?

I get his permission to adjust here and there, but it means a late night before another long Saturday in the office.

Am writing this at 2 a.m. A wet, miserable blackout.

Had a drink with Keith about 10 o'clock and an under-done steak. A bleak, deserted London, with the taxi-driver only able to take us a mile because he was short of petrol.

A letter from the Countess of Oxford and Asquith telling me of the plight of the film industry in which Anthony Asquith is a director.

I remember the last time we were together, she, Anthony and I.

I had been spending a holiday at North Berwick. Anthony was there with his mother. We had played one or two games of golf on the Gullane No. 1 course, going out on the bus from North Berwick, along the Edinburgh road.

On this particular day we were to lunch with his mother and play golf afterwards. We were both looking forward to it, being the kind of indifferent but enthusiastic players who dream that one day they will go round breaking 80.

It never happens, of course. It certainly never would have happened that day. That was no day for a mind to be free to concentrate on golf.

We lunched, but we had already spoken to each other that morning on the telephone. The afternoon round of golf was off. Definitely, irrevocably off. I was returning hurriedly to London later in the day. The Asquiths were packing up, too.

A lot of other people in all parts of Britain were packing up that day. A lot of other plans had misfired. A lot of trains were being caught that evening, for the first lap of a

journey whose ultimate destination could not even be guessed at by the passengers. A lot of journeys were certainly beginning that day—and just as certainly ending.♦

It was the day of August 23rd, 1939. It was the day Germany and Russia signed their pact of non-aggression. We knew that day, at lunch-time, that war was inevitable.

Saturday, 14th October, 1939

A PHONE call to my hotel from the office at 9 a.m. There is to be an editors' conference at the Admiralty at 10.30 a.m. Confidential. The morning papers carry the Admiralty story of three U-boats sunk the day before. Looks like we're now going to get the other side of the news.

And at 10.30 a.m. we do. The Admiralty announce the loss of the *Royal Oak*.

This is a grim day, with plenty of action. A newspaper moves on a day like this.

The first message flash to the office says: 'The Secretary of the Admiralty regrets to announce that H.M.S. *Royal Oak* has been sunk, it is believed by U-boat action. List of survivors will be issued as soon as possible.'

This is a pretty good indication of the serious nature of the loss. Break it gently. *Survivors* later. This means disaster—with a shock to the public.

And sure enough it is.

The second message flash says: 'So far as is known at present, there are about 370 survivors from the *Royal Oak*. The vessel carried a complement of 1,200 officers and men.'

The whole front page is torn up for this. 'Royal Oak: 370 saved, 800 feared lost.' And until late in the evening we wait for survivors.

Gordon Horner does an artist's impression on the back page. A good picture, but a tragic subject.

(Note later: An account based on a German report written at the time gives this record of the disaster:

At 01.30 on October 14, 1939, H.M.S. *Royal Oak*, lying at anchor in Scapa Flow, was torpedoed by U.47 (Lieutenant Prien). The operation had been carefully planned by Admiral Doenitz himself, the Flag Officer (Submarines). Prien left Kiel on October 8, a clear bright autumn day, and passed through Kiel Canal—course N.N.W., Scapa Flow.

On October 13, at 4 a.m., the boat was lying off the Orkneys. At 7 p.m.—Surface; a fresh breeze blowing, nothing in sight; looming in the half darkness the line of the distant coast; long streamers of Northern Lights flashing blue wisps across the sky. Course West. The boat crept steadily closer to Holm Sound, the eastern approach to Scapa Flow. Unfortunate it was that these channels had not been completely blocked. A narrow passage lay open between two sunken ships.

With great skill Prien steered through the swirling waters. The shore was close. A man on a bicycle could be seen going home along the coast road. Then suddenly the whole bay opened out. Kirk Sound was passed. They were in.

There under the land to the North could be seen the great shadow of a battleship lying on the water, with the great mast rising above it like a piece of filigree on a black cloth. Near, nearer—all tubes clear—no alarm, no sound but the lap of the water, the low hiss of air pressure and the sharp click of a tube lever. Los! (Fire)—five seconds—ten seconds—twenty seconds.

Then came a shattering explosion, and a great pillar of water rose in the darkness. Prien waited some minutes to fire another salvo. Tubes ready. Fire. The torpedoes hit amidships, and there followed a series of crashing explosions.

H.M.S. *Royal Oak* sank, with the loss of 786 officers and men, including Rear-Admiral H. E. C. Blagrove (Rear-Admiral Second Battle Squadron). U.47 crept quietly away back through the gap. A blockship arrived twenty-four hours later.)

What a day! Tony Gibbs' first war dispatch from the front—but it is the other side of a strange picture of war:

'This morning', he writes, 'for the first time in this exhausting war, I walked right along the British front line. It was like a walk in Surrey.'

And on one of our feature pages pretty Betty Nolan, a girl reporter, offers to become 'a pal to you lonely fighting men' by writing to them and sending her autographed pretty photograph.

I want to get away from it, if possible, and get back to the country after seeing the final edition in preparation. A bleak journey in a completely darkened train.

*Sunday, 15th October, 1939*

Slept well. Woke to rain, high wind, pretty devilish day. We are a bit cut off and on a day like this, rather *gloomily* secure up here on the hill, with dark lowering clouds and the distant sea ugly and menacing.

*Royal Oak* survivors are finally 414 out of 1,200.

Diana and John have a treasure hunt in the afternoon. Marjorie in bed with a cold. We show a film of our happy family holidays—only two months ago in North Berwick—before bath-time.

Wilf Nolan told me a story yesterday about his home town of Blackpool. There they have the usual evacuees, mostly expectant mothers. They rightly feel no embarrassment in their condition, and in fact flaunt it, walking through the town with their coats thrown open and swelling nature shoved out aggressively before them proudly proclaiming their expectant state. One youngster had pinned on to the back of one of these women the notice: 'Please return when empty.'

*Monday, 16th October, 1939*

A heavenly day. Warm and sunny after early mist. Worked in the garden, stripped to the waist; put drains in the drive, pulled up dead firs and gorse roots.

Played football with John after tea.

Wireless news of first air raid—over Edinburgh, Firth of Forth and Forth Bridge.

'No casualties among civilians' sounds as if they had got some of our planes or ships. Reported three German planes down.

Hope my mother in Edinburgh not too alarmed.

To bed with another Detective Maigret story.

*Tuesday, 17th October, 1939*

That was quite a 'do' at Edinburgh. Raiders were over the city for two hours, bombing warships in the Forth, and trying for the Forth Bridge, and no sirens were sounded in

the city. Looks as if, following *Royal Oak*, they're going for our Navy. Few people took shelter, and thousands watched the fighting in the sky.

Mother was out in it and walked home, and as she opened her front door a German bomber and two pursuit planes roared over her chimney-pots. Thirty-five naval casualties.

Warships at Scapa Flow bombed.

*Wednesday, 18th October, 1939*

Looks as if things were starting. More air-raid warnings.

Went in the black-out for half-an-hour to Empire cinema. Edward G. Robinson in something I never got the hang of; chain-gangish and lurid.

# 8

*Thursday, 19th October, 1939*

C. B. Cochran phoned asking for any help I could give him in connection with his first full war-time revue. It opens at Manchester on November 22nd with Evelyn Laye in it and Doris Hare.

'Cocky' asked me about his manuscript on Noël Coward, telling the whole story of their long association and final parting—a bit of theatrical history which I bought from him just before the war. It is now held up owing to the war, but I would like to run it soon, if everything else permits.

For nine years 'Cocky' and Noël collaborated in a series of stage productions—from *On With the Dance*, in 1925, to *Conversation Piece*, in 1934.

'Cocky' makes a wonderful story of it, giving the telegram Noël sent him on the opening night of *Bitter Sweet* in Manchester.

DEAR COCKY I DO HOPE THAT TONIGHT WILL IN SOME  
SMALL MEASURE JUSTIFY YOUR TOUCHING AND AMAZING  
FAITH IN ME WITH MY DEEPEST GRATITUDE I WISH YOU  
SUCCESS YOURS AFFECTIONATELY NOEL

The manuscript is absorbing reading, and I must get it into the paper if things go on like this and space permits. It's good to escape into the good-bad old days.

Frances Day phoned asking me to help her Penny Fund for Gifts to the Troops.

Frances Rodney came in for a chat, looking marvellous in an ensemble of mauves and heliotropes. Striped mauve

cape, mauve hat with two gay flowers, mauve veil. Her motherhood agrees with her.

What a miracle she is! Only a few years ago it seemed as if her life was over. She and her husband, Jimmy Rodney, were week-end guests at a country house which caught fire. Both jumped from a window thirty feet from the ground. Jimmy was killed. Frances lay for months with a broken back.

Lunch at the Savoy Grill with Flt-Lieut Donald McCullough. He is eager to get in touch with Lord Camrose to push through creative film propaganda. He wants to film the Royal Air Force, balloon barrage, etc., but finds nothing but 'stupid bureaucratic opposition'.

Went over to chat with Tom Clarke (who used to be Editor of the *News Chronicle*) and Air-Commodore Groves. Tom talks of resigning from Ministry of Information. He simply cannot get going on creative news propaganda. Nobody seems to want it.

Went down to the R.A.C. afterwards to have coffee with Philip Gibbs. He is off by plane to the Western Front on Tuesday morning, and Tony returns then.

Gibbs is very sad, not only because of his personal loss, but because of his disappointment at the war. We sit chatting over coffee and go back to the many times we have sat like this, talking about articles, about people, about the eternal 'situation'. Always, it seems, there is the 'situation'—international or otherwise.

It is a leave-taking. He asks me to look after Tony in the matter of work while he is away at the front. I don't really have to. Tony is a very competent 'pro' and can look after himself, but Philip has always been protective and affectionate. We talk of the last war. I tell Philip that he is going to Arras.

Back to Arras! How time stands still, or repeats itself. He makes a wry face.

And then his thoughts go back to Arras and the tunnels of Arras where, during the big battle in 1917, our troops advanced in single file through these tunnels towards the front line. There was just enough room for a single file of



lightly-wounded to brush past them coming the other way from the front.

'It made a wonderfully eerie picture,' Gibbs says. 'In the gloom the passing men peered at each other, and their equipment clinked and chinkled against the sides of the tunnel. I shall never forget the picture.'

And again about Arras: 'I remember a winter day there. Somewhere around Christmas. There were a number of Scots regiments in Arras and the C.O. got the idea of having a massed pipers' band playing in the square. He was immensely pleased because it was the first time in history that the pipers of eight regiments had played together. And certainly it was a fine sight to see those pipers marching up and down in the Arras town square, with the snow falling about them.'

The best soldier of all, Gibbs thinks, was the Cockney. 'He had nimbleness, wit, inperturbability and an unfailing ability to put up with anything. And always he had a smile.'

We talk about the soldiers of today.

'They're quite different in appearance from our war,' thinks Gibbs. 'They seem to belong to this mechanised age, and have deep thoughtful eyes and hatchet-like lean faces. They all look as if they had been to the London School of Economics. I talked of them the other day to an old officer. "They think far more than the old soldier", he said. "In fact they think too damned much. But they won't make half so good a soldier as the old sweat of the last war—the round-faced chap with a moustache."'

Finished a pretty busy day by locking myself up with Mrs Sones and dictating about seven thousand words of necessary odds and ends between 6.30 p.m. and 10.15 p.m. We broke off for half-an-hour at 7.30 for coffee, eggs and ham. No bacon, thanks to restricted imports from Denmark.

*Friday, 20th October, 1939*

R. S. Hudson (Overseas Trade) strikes me as a man who knows his job. Dark, lean, capable. Quietly sure of himself.

He has a tough job, as our exports must just be about completely dried up by now.

He is trying to break the block, but mentions the difficult problems of allocating raw materials to proper quarters for export, and at the same time for war material. Exported locomotives, for instance, are essential for us to keep our overseas trade; and yet it's equally necessary for us to produce tanks and engines for France. There's a wool problem, too.

Army has just requisitioned for millions of blankets, although it will be six months at least before they can get them; and with a dreadful wool shortage and overseas countries holding out for better prices.

I suggested a new trade pact with Russia. Hudson agreed that if this could be secured without any strings attached, such as condonation of Soviet's tactics with Finland and Baltic countries, it would be excellent and of great value.

Hudson thinks Italy is just waiting her time.

'Half the high army officers in Italy think Hitler will be in Paris in three months time; the other half think *we* shall win.'

*Saturday, 21st October, 1939*

Took a Saturday off for once! Played football with Diana and John. Lovely day.

*Sunday, 22nd October, 1939*

A good paper. Read it in the sunshine. Big North Sea air battle. Convoy warships beat off raiders, bagging eight out of twelve. Gibbs, Beverley Nichols, Blatchford, Churchill, Georges Simenon, Dorothy Parker and C. E. Grey (on Nazi planes) all in the paper today.

Diana, washing up dishes with John and me in the

kitchen, told me of this poem she had just composed. At eight years of age she is thinking of war poems!

What Can Hitler Do?  
Greedy Man That He Is  
With His Tanks and Corps  
At the present war?  
Think of his ambissous Nations  
With their cities and plantations  
But no Food and Money to Produce  
Enough for their own Use.

*Monday, 23rd October, 1939*

Up early and drove through cold early morning to school at Burgess Hill with Diana and Marjorie. Worked in the garden.

*Tuesday, 24th October, 1939*

Lunch with Drysdale.

Long discussion with Neville Foster, old editor of *Land and Water* and now Raemakers' adviser, about Raemakers' agreement. I want to have all syndication rights for the paper, Raemakers wants Curtis Brown to have them.

Foster tells me he wants to revive *Land and Water* and suggests that if it were done Hilaire Belloc could be recalled to his old job, and a cartoon by Raemakers could be used. I promise to mention the idea elsewhere.

To bed, reading Sir Neville Henderson's final report on the circumstances leading up to the outbreak of war.

*Wednesday, 25th October, 1939*

With the shortage of news, it's essential to do something in the paper to keep the interest in the war going, so in the night I had an idea of turning our present double-spread of two large pages in the centre of the paper into a magazine section in which would be high-lighted eight features angled on different aspects of the war.

The reader will thus get a full-size paper of news and a tabloid of eight small pages in the centre fold—all part and parcel of the same printing.

Worked on it all morning, making up a dummy and choosing types. It looked fine. Tried it on the boys, and they like it.

An old friend gives me an excellent verbal picture of Simon (Sir John Simon) and his 'four-track brain' capacity for dealing with one problem and tackling another at the same time, and of his resourcefulness in drawing up formulae.

'It is happening every day', he says. 'In the midst of a discussion, in which naturally there is a divergence of opinion, Simon will be writing away on a sheet of paper, and presently he will hand it to the P.M. saying: "Prime Minister, would not this perhaps be a fairly accurate presentation of the various differences of opinion with a suggested basis of common agreement and action?"'

'And more often than not, it will be. Simon has an extraordinary memory, and frequently in the middle of a discussion will refer to works of reference, mentioning even the number of a page on which a judgement or a decision was given, as long ago perhaps as twenty years.

'Simon is an invaluable man', my friend says. 'It was the same in Baldwin's day. At the time of the abdication of Edward VIII, when Edward would be phoning Baldwin at every hour of the day and night, Baldwin would be at the end of the line, asking "What did you say, Sir?" in order to gain time, while Simon, listening in on a duplicate telephone, would scribble a reply and hand it to Baldwin who would then say: "Well, Sir, in my view . . .".

'And yet Simon is a man with few friends. There is an immense mental aloofness that seemingly puts him out of the sympathy of the average man. He would be hopeless as P.M.' (As I listen, I remember Philip Gibbs' remarks about Haig. Curious how many men in high positions lack the common touch.)

In this connection I mention Chamberlain, and my friend agrees that to a certain extent Chamberlain has the same aloofness. But it is offset by many other qualities. He is wholehearted in his admiration for Chamberlain although appreciating his limitations, and thinks he is the right man in the right place.

'He is the only man who knows where the sewers are underneath a town', he says by way of explanation; 'the only man, who by virtue of his municipal training, understands why a thing happens and what happens when things are set in motion. The average Cabinet Minister makes a decision, but is quite ignorant of the detailed functioning of work set in motion by his decision. Chamberlain knows it all.'

He tells me of Chamberlain's methods of working. How, every evening, he will have a box packed by his secretary, with just exactly the amount of work that he can get through in an hour and a half. Then he will go home to dinner, change ('he still changes every evening'), separate himself from all ordinary war conduct and 'become a gentleman'.

Then, after dinner (at 9 p.m. or 9.30 p.m.), he excuses himself from his guests, goes up to his room, opens the dispatch box and goes through every paper, making careful annotations and remarks in his neat writing. At exactly 11 p.m. the work is finished and he is off to bed.

Next morning the secretary gets the box, and acts on the remarks and decisions.

In conference the P.M. is 'far and away the dominating mind; a bit schoolmasterish, a little stuff, but unquestionably the head of the table'.

He tells me that when Winston went into the Cabinet there was a feeling that there might be a clash, but after the first meeting or two the P.M. quietly but firmly took the reins in his hands and continues to control them.

What a charming picture! He does qualify it by deprecating that Chamberlain doesn't understand the Continental mind and thinks definitely that he would be a bad peace negotiator. When I ask him if Chamberlain is likely to be the right man for a war, he replies: 'Right so long as the war remains the diplomatic war it is. After that I cannot say.'

This strange expectation of a 'peaceful' war!

I am told that supplies for the Forces are greater than hoped for owing to the unexpected nature of the war and the consequent failure on the part of the Army to consume material. The lull has given us a chance to build up supplies.

But the Air Force have underestimated their munition consumption, particularly of .303 ammunition.

This story of the French: When they went to attack a forest, they knew it was full of unexploded mine traps. So they drove cattle into the forest, not troops, and exploded the mines.

Started work on the new tabloid magazine pages.

Dinner with Nick, and Lottie and Sam at the Café Royal. Nick looked very smart as a Lieutenant in R.A.M.C. attached to the London Scottish anti-aircraft.

To a film afterwards, *Only Angels Have Wings*, full of mock heroes: Meant to be grim; only a scream. Nick full of stories of Army inefficiency at the top and good human material in the lower ranks. Red tape seems to be more plentiful today than ever.

*Thursday, 26th October, 1939*

Heard that General Franco, following Hitler's pact with Soviet, gave his personal assurance to French that 'you need not keep one French soldier now on the Franco-Spanish border'. French accepted that, and carted off a whole Army Corps.

Lunch with S. He tells me of his son's letter from Portsmouth complaining that the Navy puts saltpetre or something in the ratings' food to reduce their sexual desire. The boy is getting married shortly and now finds he has had no sexual stirrings since he joined up!

So then S. goes on to tell me a story of when he was a young man on the stage and went to Portsmouth with a touring company. A fat woman with 'enormous buttocks and bosoms' invited him, next door to his theatrical digs, to have a cup of tea with her.

Every wall of her room, from ceiling to floor, was covered with navy photographs--from Admirals to middies--'all signed'. She remarked: 'These are some of my boys.'

'Some!' commented S. 'I needed no saltpetre to put me off sexual desire with her---if I ever had any! But to think of my son in Portsmouth coming across that woman's, 1939 equivalent!'

*Friday, 27th October, 1939*

Lunch with Drysdale. He is trying to revive the magazine, *The Passing Show*.

Went to see Charles Wakeling—talk of 'what the hell is there left to strive for? One five-year war, then the struggle to build up a business, and then this!'

Tea with Neville Foster *re* the new Raemakers' contract. The Raemakers' cartoon comes in as we talk. It is very poor. I use an old 1914 Raemakers instead.

The new small Sunday magazine pages have come up well. All the printers have been enthusiastic helpers, and it is lovely to see this come off so beautifully when the idea was born only forty-eight hours ago. It should look good on Sunday.

Hear that Gibbs' first war dispatch has arrived.

*Saturday, 28th October, 1939*

A quiet day but the paper came up well; the magazine feature pages are good, leading off with an editorial on:

### THE WAR ISN'T OVER YET!

'It is high time we stopped deluding ourselves. One of these days—and it may be very soon—we are going to get a first-class shock. We shall wake up and find there is a real war on.

'These eight weeks of sparring and skirmishing and talking have deceived many. They will have a rude awakening when the real thing starts.'

And it ends on this note:

'Now the Nazis realise that we mean business. And like other gangsters, being cornered, they are going to try to shoot their way out, with tanks and gas and bombs and everything they have.'

Home after first edition. German raider brought down near Edinburgh.

*Sunday, 29th October, 1939*

Drink in the evening with Reeves and Powell in their hut

at the camp, and one with Sergeants Mileham and 'Farr in the house.

*Monday, 30th October, 1939*

(Am writing this actually a week later than the date, having missed diary by a week. Spent Monday at home, working in the garden.)

*Tuesday, 31st October, 1939*

Busy, routine, uneventful day.



# 9

*Wednesday, 1st November, 1939*

TONY GIBBS looked in, full of our deficiencies at the front. He is going to write a report to Hore-Belisha. I ask him for copy.

Went to Herbert Farjeon's *Little Revue* in the evening. The best thing is the song 'Even Hitler had a Mother'. Should make a winner of a marching song.

Earlier, lunched at the Ivy with Phyllis Digby Morton. Exchanged gossip with Herbert Tingay, Arthur Ferrier, A. D. Peters, Howard Marshall, Reeves Shaw.

Tony Gibbs is sending his report to Hore-Belisha tomorrow: it makes good reading.

Shamley Green,  
Guildford,  
Surrey.

2nd November, 1939.

To:

The Rt Hon. Leslie Hore-Belisha, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for War.

Dear Mr Hore-Belisha,

Forgive my writing to you like this, but I returned three days ago from a visit as War Correspondent to the British sector of the Western Front, and reported in confidence to my editor certain disquieting deficiencies in the organisation of the British Expeditionary Force, which he urged that it was my duty to place directly before you. They are these:

1. No private soldier to whom I have talked in France has more than one blanket.

The cold is already intense, and while one blanket may be sufficient for those men who are fortunate enough to be billeted in barns and places where there is straw, there are many others sleeping on the concrete floors of garages and such-like places, who are suffering intensely from the cold, and it is a fact that there are many of these people, including our own batmen and driver at Press headquarters, who have not had their clothes off since they left England.

2. In many units there is a serious shortage of equipment, particularly of replacements.

One realises, of course, the elaborateness of the organisation required to transport all this material, in some cases via Brest, and to deliver it by night stages to the various units scattered over the countryside in accordance with the modern theory of dispersal.

Nevertheless, to take one glaring example, there is stationed at Boiry-Notre-Dame, a few kilometres from Arras, a mechanised unit of the 12th/17th Lancers. This unit is supposed to be equipped with eight small tanks, but it possesses only seven—a high percentage of deficiency.

The tracks of these tanks which should be replaced after 800 to 900 miles, have already covered 2,000 miles and no replacements are available. The spring tension has already been adjusted to its utmost limit to take up the stretch, and if these tanks are ordered into action the tracks will fail to engage with the driving sprocket wheels if they do not break immediately.

In addition to this, not one single gun of the fourteen guns on those seven tanks can be fired in action, because they are floating loose on their mountings, the shoulder pieces for them not having arrived.

In addition even to this the wireless sets with which these tanks and carriers are intended to communicate with one another on the field of battle, have been delivered permanently tuned to the wavelength of the E.B.C. so that the orders of the commanding officer are inextricably blended with the chiming of Big Ben and the pleasantries of Big-Hearted Arthur.

This unit has only four officers, and since it was

mechanised for the first time on January 1st of this year, and two of the officers have been called in from the Reserve List, only the other two officers had, when I saw them, driven a tank more than three times in their lives. These are the people who are expected to be the spearhead of any advance into Belgium, should that country's neutrality be violated from the other side, and unless something is done about them, they will go forward to certain massacre.

3. The extraordinary conditions of secrecy imposed upon the British Army which involves tremendous inconveniences in the way of the non-delivery of letters, the distances of troops from any possibility of entertainment, or the purchase of cigarettes at the local N.A.A.F.I. which may be twenty miles away, together with the elaborate misleading of the people at home as to the whereabouts and safety of the British Army, are completely vitiated by the fact that there are 28,000 Belgians who live on their own side of the frontier and travel to and from twice daily to their work in Lille.

There is nothing to prevent any one of these Belgians from handing on by word of mouth any knowledge he may gain as to the distribution of the various regiments, and/or the state of their defences. Indeed, there is nothing to prevent any German civilian from walking up to the Belgian frontier and inspecting the British Front Line at a distance of twenty yards.

One Colonel of the Warwickshires to whom I spoke told me that he had shot sixty-four carrier pigeons passing eastwards above his pillbox, in a fortnight, all carrying code messages attached to their legs, which he thought might have some connection with smuggling. While obviously nothing can be done to prevent the inspection of the British Front Line by wandering Germans on the neutral side of the border, it would seem that representation might be made to the French Government to stop the coming and going of that army of Belgian civilians, and that some measures might be taken to exterminate the pigeons.

4. While I cannot pretend to any military knowledge whatever, or any clue as to the intentions of the Higher Command with regard to abandoning this line in favour

of any advance into Belgium, there are certain apparently deliberate weaknesses in the British position which must be alarming to the pedestrian observer.

I understand from General Mason MacFarlane, Director of Military Intelligence, that there are twenty-seven German divisions concentrated in the neighbourhood of Aachen, and a further fifteen to seventeen concentrated to the rear and slightly to the north of these. Against this threat we have *four* British divisions holding a line whose left is the apex of the Lille salient, whose right is St Amand, a distance, allowing indentations, of some thirty-five miles.

The fortifications of this line consist of a series of concrete pillboxes built by the French in 1937, arranged so that each is in sight of its neighbour on either side, and connected by a shallow ditch which is intended to be an obstacle to tanks. The pillboxes are purposely built in such a way with a machine-gun on one side, and an anti-tank gun on the other, that it is impossible to fire forwards from them but only sideways.

Moreover, the thickness of the concrete is such that the arc of fire on either side is in effect restricted by the actual ditch, and an advancing enemy therefore would be allowed to approach level with the pillboxes before being met with any fire whatever. Needless to say, a short artillery preparation would rapidly so alter the contours of the ditch as to make it perfectly practicable for passage by tanks which, having negotiated it, would immediately once again be outside the narrow range of fire.

I realise of course that this is all in accordance with the 'curtain of fire' theory, but feel impelled at the same time to question whether or not there should be some more elaborately dug trench-defence system in addition, if only to fall back on, containing the men to hold it. A sergeant and a dozen men every six hundred yards in a pillbox armed with two guns only looks horribly weak to me, and, doubtless also, to the 28,000 Belgian civilians.

Incidentally, one of the periscopes through which I looked, belonging to the Coldstream Guards at Ham, was masked by the grass-grown earth round the top of it, so that the next pillbox to the left, held by the French, was invisible. It was a matter of considerable surprise to H.M. Brigade of Guards when I indicated this disadvantage.

'Apart from the iron door to the rear of these pillboxes there is no means of communication with their defenders when once they are shut inside. There is no trap in the floor and passage back for the removal of wounded and the relief of the garrison, either with additional men or additional ammunition. They are not even connected by telephone.

Some of the local commanders have envisaged this difficulty and attempted to overcome it by digging rudimentary support trenches which, in the soft clay soil, fall in almost as quickly as they are dug. These are the only trenches and this is the only defensive system which I could find on the British front, and the privately expressed view of the 'man on the spot' is that, discounting any possible Belgian resistance, the Germans could walk through here at any moment they liked.

It is with considerable trepidation that I advance these criticisms, and realise that I lay myself open to the charge of tactical ignorance. Nevertheless I was asked on several occasions in France if I would endeavour to bring these matters to your attention.

Yours sincerely,  
ANTHONY GIBBS.

*Thursday, 2nd November, 1939*

New Sunday magazine pages again look very promising. Liddell Hart, Robert Blatchford, 'Sapper', all contribute.

Phoned Leslie Howard *re* making film about Sir Neville Henderson and his experiences in Berlin.

*Friday, 3rd November, 1939*

Went to see Anthony Asquith's film of Terence Rattigan's play *French Without Tears*. Dreadful. No story, and the whole spoilt by far too many close-ups showing the horrible workings of people's faces. No *Pygmalion*, this one.

Ræmakers doing cartoon of Nazi camp horrors, based on Neville Henderson's reports and White Paper.

*Saturday, 4th November, 1939*

Home earlier than usual in evening. Wilf Nolan doing final edition. The paper should be full of meat, although there is little actual news.

Hitler still appears to be trying to win diplomatic war; Ribbentrop going back to Moscow, and Goering reported going to Rome.

Roosevelt signs repeal of Neutrality Bill.

Diana and John learning to knit in front of fire, Diana spouting French as she does so.

A wild night with the wind rising and beating against the house.

*Sunday, 5th November, 1939*

Came down in train last night with young Air Force craftsman. Going to spend week-end at Lewes, has been on indefinite leave since joining Air Force three days after start of war. O.T.C. boy, he is going to be a pilot, but owing to shortage of training planes and schools he cannot yet be absorbed.

Three days actual service out of two months—not bad going. Surely he could be getting some kind of technical training.

Rolled the lawn today. Rain and wind at night.

*Monday, 6th November, 1939*

Took Marjorie and Sheila to Brighton through the storm and black-out and had dinner (duckling) at the Old Ship Hotel.

Afterwards went to see a film (Claudette Colbert and James Stewart in *Isn't Life Wonderful*). Pretty good fun. One seeks almost any kind of escape—films, radio, anything—from the dull boredom of this kind of war.

Home about midnight to a lovely clear sky, thick with stars.

*Tuesday, 7th November, 1939*

H. G. Wells fixed for the magazine pages. Serialising also *The Lion Has Wings*—story of R.A.F. film by Ian Dalrymple, showing some actual Kiel Canal shots.

Philip Gibbs writes from the Front: 'How long are you proposing to keep me out here? It is a futile and degrading business.'

*Wednesday, 8th November, 1939*

Hitler's beer-hall speech attacking Britain. Explosion in hall just after he left. Several killed. Was it a bomb for Hitler?

*Thursday, 9th November, 1939*

In the evening, to get away from it all, tried to bury myself writing a long short story, *Love in the Clouds*, a story about a fighter pilot. Sheer escapism for one of the magazines.

Potted shrimps and brandy at Savoy Grill and then to a film at the Dominion - *Dodge City*. God only knows who was in it, but one of those tremendous epics about pioneering days in America, and the evolution of a city from gunmen up to gunmen. Coloured—very. A pistol crack in every hundred feet of film.

*Friday, 10th November, 1939*

Sir Samuel Hoare is not an inspiring person, and rather what you'd expect from his record—the Hoare-Laval business over Abyssinia and the League of Nations.

Thin-lipped, precise, bloodless, looking at you out of fish-like eyes, like a cautious spinster fearing for her virginity. A master of unequivocal compromise. Uninspiring, old schooltish, his first thin remark apropos Chamberlain, who has gout: 'A very good account of Neville, by the way.'

I can't imagine him initiating or creating anything. Rubs his hands together nervously and gazes, unrevealingly blank, towards you, waiting for inspiration. Or maybe that is Diplomacy.

But behind all this—and I may have been unfair about him—there is some kind of realistic vision. For instance, he believes that the day may come when the Empire-trained R.A.F. pilots and the aircraft from Canada might win the war, if both sides here paralyse their industrial productive life by incessant bombing.

One of the first real notes of warning I have heard. Full marks to him!

Discussion about the threatened invasion of Holland and Belgium, and the bomb at Munich yesterday.

*Saturday, 11th November, 1939*

A quick snack in the evening between editions after a dull, routine day, making what we could of the little news: CHANNEL STEAMER BOMBED; and WEST FRONT BLAZES UP(!)

Home to the country about midnight.

*Sunday, 12th November, 1939*

Started clearing gorse bushes from the right side of the drive. Nice work and satisfying, reclaiming ground from this gorse-covered hill. It shows such quick, thorough and lasting results. And it is nicely physical, taking one away from one's eternal mental preoccupation.

In the evening Churchill made a fine fighting speech on the wireless, full of the things which, said by other leaders two years ago, might have saved Europe:

'You know I have not always agreed with Mr Chamberlain; though we have always been personal friends. But he is a man of very tough fibre, and I can tell you that he is going to fight as obstinately for victory as he did for peace.

'You may take it absolutely for certain that either all that Britain and France stand for in the modern world will go down, or that Hitler, the Nazi regime and the recurring German or Prussian menace to Europe will be broken and destroyed. That is the way the matter lies and everybody had better make up their minds to that solid, sombre fact. . . .

'So now these boastful and bullying Nazis are looking with hungry eyes for some small countries in the west which



they can trample down and loot, as they have trampled down and looted Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Now they turn their fierce, but also rather circumspect, glare upon the ancient, civilised and unoffending Dutch and Belgian nations. . . .

'I shall not attempt to prophesy whether the frenzy of a cornered maniac will drive Herr Hitler into the worst of all his crimes; but this I will say without a doubt, that the fate of Holland and Belgium, like that of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria, will be decided by the victory of the British Empire and the French Republic. If we are conquered, all will be enslaved. If we are not destroyed, all these countries will be rescued and restored to life and freedom.'

Afterwards on B.B.C. a Scrapbook of the year 1929—what memories it brings back on this Sunday evening of 1939—what memories of what a year!

It was the year of Al Jolson's 'Sonny Boy', and 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips' and 'If I Had a Talking Picture of You—oo!' It was the wonderful year of *Broadway Melody*, and Fred Astaire in *Funny Face*, and Layton and Johnstone 'Painting the Clouds with Sunshine'.

England won the Ashes that year, Wall Street crashed, ruining thousands of people—and British and French occupation troops left the Rhine.

In the blazing first week of September of that year my news editor Reggie Simpson and I took a week-end off and sat in comfortable deck chairs on Ryde Pier watching Sir John Foster Fraser sweating while he wrote out his story for our newspaper, of the Schneider Cup race, in which aeroplanes flew for the first time at 350 m.p.h.—and which provided the try-out for the engine that has since made our Spitfires.

What a year! *Journey's End* had its first night, and so had Shaw's *Apple Cart*, and—in Manchester—a little thing by Noël Coward called *Bitter Sweet* burst on an enchanted audience.

As always with Cochran first nights, I went up to Manchester for the occasion. . . . The Manchester first night was

riotous', wrote Coward in *Present Indicative*. 'Peggy (Wood) made a gracious speech and so did Cockie, in which he touchingly and generously handed me the credit for the whole production which, I may say, without his enthusiasm, his lavishness, and his unwavering trust in me, could never have been possible.

'The Press notices the next day were almost incoherent with praise, and the house was immediately sold out for the entire three weeks. . . . I think that of all the shows I have ever done *Bitter Sweet* gave me the greatest personal pleasure. My favourite moments were: the finale of the first act when Carl and Sari elope; the café scene when the curtain slowly falls on Carl's death, in a silence broken only by Manon's sobs; the entrance of Madame Sari Linden in her exquisite white dress of the nineties, and above all, the final moment of the play when, to the last crashing chords of "I'll See You Again", Sari, as an old woman, straightens herself with a gesture of indomitable pride and gallantly walks off the stage.

'That gesture was entirely Peggy's idea, and the inspired dramatic simplicity of it set her for ever in my memory as a superb actress.'

1929 was the year, too, when Priestley published his *Good Companions*, when penicillin first became news, when *All Quiet on the Western Front* smashed its way into the bookshops.

It was a personal year for me, too, and *All Quiet* had something to do with it. My first novel, *This Year, Next Year* was published that year and when I was interesting a bookseller friend in it he gave me a first rough-proof copy of *All Quiet*, raving about it.

I took the proofs home, read them, wrote the first advance notice of *All Quiet* in this country—three columns in my own paper—to give vent to my own enthusiasm. A few weeks later the book shops were full of *All Quiet*, which proceeded to sell in its hundreds of thousands. My own novel did quite well—but not all that well!

One day, when I was in Manchester, I went to lunch at the Midland Hotel. I had reached the coffee stage when three

ladies came into the French restaurant. The youngest was carrying a book with a bright orange-coloured binding.

My novel had a bright orange-coloured binding. She looked just like the kind of intelligent, attractive woman who should be reading my book! They sat down at the far side of the room.

'I think', I said to my waiter, 'that that young woman over there has got my book.'

He looked over, skipped adroitly across the room, took a quick look, came back, said:

'It's called, *This Year*, something.'

'I thought so', I said in delight. 'That's my book.'

Sympathetically he asked: Where did you leave it, sir? Such is fame.

But I was so delighted, I sent them across a message asking them if they would join me over a drink. They were as charming as they appeared to be; we became friends; I invited the youngest—my public!—to the first night of Coward's *Bitter Sweet*.

For buying my first novel she had the reward of being present at one of the most tumultuous first nights in the British theatre.

Yes—what a year. Byrd was at the South Pole, a financier called Hatry was well in the news, and Ramsay MacDonald had gone to America to discuss limitation of armaments—between Great Britain and the United States!

And now to have so much of it all brought back to one by the B.B.C. in the bleakness of this present war. . .

*Monday, 13th November, 1939*

Quiet day in the country; continued working on the drive. Worked on a long short story. Reeves of the searchlight detachment came to dinner.

# IO

*Tuesday, 14th November, 1939*

I'm beginning to lose touch with my diary. But am not surprised. This is the second week I've not managed to keep it up, and am doing so a week later. Am falling into the prevailing habit of thinking there is no war, in spite of every day of my life talking about it, writing about it, and preparing for it.

Went to see a film called *Every Other Inch a Lady*—the usual drug.

Beverley Nichols looked in. We talked of the Riviera and other days.

*Wednesday, 15th November, 1939*

Finished short story. Drysdale can rejoin the Army, taking his old rank, Acting Captain (Gazetted 2nd Lieutenant) and go to the Pioneer Corps at Clacton. Lucky devil.

A current story:

Waiting for the green light to cross Piccadilly, two young gum-chewing girls were talking about their boy friends.

'Last night', said one, 'I went to a dance with Joey. He's just come out after doing time for bashing his girl about.'

'Aren't you scared?' asked the other. 'He might do the same to you.'

'No', said the first; 'we ain't serious.'

*Thursday, 16th November, 1939*

From Hamburg radio Lord Hawt Haw (the British traitor,

William Joyce) railed at me and my newspaper following on my article last Sunday.

*Friday, 17th November, 1939*

At lunch Sir John Simon is much more human and friendly than is generally imagined, although one is aware of a distinct mental aloofness, as if one part of his brain is preoccupied with other matters.

I remember him as I used to see him in the August holidays on the golf course at North Berwick, diligently practising iron shots before dinner in front of the Marine Hotel, with beautiful concentration.

At the end of the lunch he tells me about his golf lessons with James Braid. When Simon hit a dud Braid would shake his head slowly and say "Tut-tut". When he sent a screamer right down the fairway and looked to Braid for praise, Braid would nod his head slowly and murmur: 'No' bad, no' bad!'

A lovely lunch. As he helps himself to the mixed grill Simon murmurs: 'Well, we're certainly not in Germany.'

He begins (the eternal lawyer) by mentioning a law suit, settled yesterday, and wonders why no one asked 'the essential question' in the case. He goes on to illustrate this point about the essential question by telling about one of Hooley's cases in which he was briefed against Hooley.

'It was one of those involved cases', Simon says. 'Someone had been buying a coalmine one day and transferring the shares to a cinema the next, and merging the whole with a chocolate factory the third—or some such thing.' Simon thought round the case and determined to fix in the minds of the jury what he considered the essential element in the case.

His first question to Hooley therefore was: 'Mr Hooley, would you call this an ordinary commercial transaction?'

Hooley was in a fix from that moment. He could not admit that it was not an ordinary business transaction, so was compelled to answer in the affirmative. Simon left the question at that, but proceeded to draw Hooley out on the story of the transaction.

Sure enough, in about five minutes, a member of the jury, obviously suffering agonies, blurted out: 'But, my Lord, he said it was an ordinary business transaction!'

He told another delightful story. One day in an hotel, he was waiting to go down in the lift. The lift came, stopped at the floor. As Simon stepped in, he noticed in the lift a large man with a panama hat and large red carnation in his buttonhole, with two well-dressed girls.

The lift gate closed behind Simon and in that second's pause of stillness before the machine clicks into life, he heard the large man whisper: 'My dears, have a good look at the man who tried to ruin your father.'

Simon's face showed no sign that he had heard. When the lift got to the ground floor, the others stepped out.

Simon tarried a moment: 'Who was that large man?' he asked the liftman.

'Search me', said the liftman

'And search me!' Simon finished: 'for the life of me I could not remember who the man was!'

In the evening saw a film *Good Girls Go to Paris*—Joan Blondell and Melvyn Douglas.

*Saturday, 18th November, 1939*

Paper good, with Lord Derby, A. A. Milne, Reginald Arkell, Dorothy Parker in the magazine pages. A quiet day, leading the first column of the front page with our reply to Lord Haw-Haw's distorted broadcast about ourselves. Then when the final edition had gone there was a flash: 'Dutch Liner Hits Nazi Mine; 140 Feared Lost'. So we quickly replated and led paper on that. A neutral ship *could* lead to trouble. Jimmy Mellor and Tom Moore came in. They can't keep away from the office, even in the army!

*Sunday, 19th November, 1939*

Nice to get home, Met by whole family. In the evening Sgts Mileham and Farr to dinner. Detachment is leaving our land a week from today. Diana and John will be sad.

Mileham gave me snaps of our children standing at attention with rifles. They have enjoyed themselves playing soldiers, and everyone has been wonderful to them. Good old British Army.

*Monday, 20th November, 1939*

Enough petrol, even on rationing, to go to Seaford where Sheila and I played few holes of golf. Lovely sunny day. Petrol allowance is seven gallons on our fourteen-h.p. car with a supplementary of thirteen gallons, making twenty for the month.

German raider passed close over the house and disappeared towards Brighton.

*Tuesday, 21st November, 1939*

Tony Gibbs came in to talk about his suggested propaganda film *Life of Hitler*. Post Office film unit would like John Maxwell to do it. I phoned Walter Mycroft, who is close to Maxwell, about it.

Keith's father phoned from Frinton during morning to say liner was sinking off Frinton coast. (Later proved to be 1,000-ton Japanese liner, mined. Beginning of German mine-laying campaign.)

Went to Ballet Rambert at Duchess Theatre. They did *Lac de Cygne*, *Lady into Fox* (Sally Gilmour very good with Walter Gore), and *Bar aux Folies Bergères*. Noticed towards end Ninette de Valois slipping out of her seat in the dark; she appeared on stage at final curtain.

I remember Pearl Argyle in this 'Bar' ballet, and taking her out one night from Sadler's Wells. What a charming person. How my old friend Miles Mander fell for her, and I don't blame him!

*Wednesday, 22nd November, 1939*

German mine horrors in full swing. Sinking ships galore. Lots of air-raids; no bombs except in the Shetlands.

Took an hour off in the afternoon and went to see toys for Christmas in Hamleys. Lots of guns and aeroplanes and searchlights and models of Maginot lines. Tea at Fullers nearby.

Went to see *Stanley and Livingstone* film for an hour. Miles Mander in it. Spencer Tracy very good. Cedric Hardwicke excellent.

*Thursday, 23rd November, 1939*

Phyllis Digby Morton took me to Foyle's literary lunch at Grosvenor House where Dr Benes spoke on the fate of the Czechs and ultimate victory. War same as last, he declared; struggle of liberty-loving people against enslavers.

Chatted with H. G. Wells and Baroness Budberg. Sir Ronald Storrs, chairman. H. G. Wells made speech, though obviously very tired.

But best speech from Jan Masaryk, who reminded us all in Britain that this was our last chance. If we did not win now we should go down for ever.

Foul night. To bed with the American magazine, *Liberty*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Cosmopolitan* magazine and Gen. Spears' *Prelude to Victory*.

*Friday, 24th November, 1939*

Met Hon. Oliver Stanley (Board of Trade). A good head of a department, extremely nice person, charming, quietly likeable, but uninspiring and giving impression somewhere that he is not altogether sure of himself. And yet not so long ago great things were expected of him—a coming Prime Minister, some people said.

Again in Stanley there is that loyal admiration for Chamberlain, who 'reads every document, knows what it is about and is prepared to discuss it'. There is no doubt that Chamberlain must have exceptional qualities, and, as far as his Cabinet is concerned, appears to be a natural chairman.

Stanley on exports is very serious. His problem is a considerable one.



'It isn't a question of finding the markets', he says, 'it's more a matter of having the ships, the clear seas, raw materials and the men to handle the goods.'

He is rather like a curate with his eye-glasses, his diffident manner, and his engaging wanting-to-be-liked smile, with all a curate's toothiness.

He is sure that we are all under-rating the enemy, are far too optimistic in a blind way, and that we cannot win without bloody and desperate fighting. As I have been tiresomely saying this to anyone who will listen, I am naturally disposed in his favour as far as his outlook is concerned.

He defends the Government's plans, which have appeared to be 'muddled' so far because the war has not assumed the character anticipated, but he believes that all the emergencies provided for have not been wiped out but only postponed. A sane outlook indeed.

Douglas and Neville Berry are leaving us today for Sandhurst—four months course, and then the Guards. Neville went to Cochran's first night in Manchester and tells me 'I saw an old friend of yours--Frances Day.'

Am reprinting in our magazine section an article from my paper of 28th September, 1930 (nine years ago) headed 'Beware of Hitler!' It is a forecast, sent from Berlin by one of my staff, James Mellor. As long ago as 1930 he said: 'There are difficult times ahead for Britain if the reins of power are placed in the hands of Hitler--a happening that daily becomes more likely. . . . He may be the man who will wreck Europe and plunge the world into confusion.'

Tea at Fullers and another visit to the toys at Hamleys.

Empire Theatre in the evening. *Fast and Furious*, a film with Franchot Tone and Ann Sothorn. Light, amusing and entertaining.

*Saturday, 25th November, 1939*

Went down to the Strand before going to the office and bought Diana a hundred stamps for sixpence. How lovely to see the stamps through the cellophane 'peeper' on the envelope, and what schoolboy joy the sight brought back.

Funny to think of Diana doing what I did twenty-five years ago. How I loved stamp-collecting. What joy there is in it for a youngster—the joy of colour, of pictures, of learning. And what changes in stamps there have been since that long ago day when I sold my collection before joining the Army for the last war.

Drysdale was waiting for me when I got to my office. In uniform. A Captain in the new Pioneer Corps.

He's beaten me to it all right. How right and natural he looked in his uniform—much more at home actually than in civilian clothes. And how little surprise there was to see him in it. Drysdale has always seemed to me to be a misfit in civilian life. Five years of service in the last show ruined him completely for the peace.

Rumour that the *Deutschland* is sunk. Unconfirmed. But it sets us on our toes most of the day, preparing articles, pictures, lay-outs in case the report is confirmed later in the day. Headlines ready to rush into the front page. The day wears on. The reports are definitely denied and then mysteriously reborn. The Silent Service remains silent. We run on the front page a story from our diplomatic correspondent: Truth About the Blitzkrieg: Hitler's Plan to wipe us out. And the story says: 'Hitler has set another new date for his much-delayed blitzkrieg. It's to be in May, 1940. Meanwhile there are to be no attacks on London.'

*Sunday, 26th November, 1939*

Made John a toy harbour today, complete with little sheds, houses, green and red lights, etc. Put miniature metal war-ships in it. Looks quite promising. Diana delighted with her stamps.

Sergeant Mileham and Farr (now Sgt-Major and wearing his crown) came to have a farewell drink. (Party for Sgt Major Farr by soldiers.) And after them came Reeves. They leave tomorrow for another searchlight site, should be back in eight months. Eight months! I'm ready to bet they won't be here in eight months' time.

They have been good friends to the children, Mileham

particularly. The children will remember this war and the soldiers.

Gale and wild storm coming in from the sea at night. Chamberlain on wireless. First-rate.

*Monday, 27th November, 1939*

Finished John's harbour. Took Diana to school at Burgess Hill.

The new searchlight crowd have come to take over in a howling gale and driving rain. What a weekend.

And the Germans have sunk the *Rawalpindi* and a big Polish liner. Eleven ships in the last two or three days.

Jean Colin singing on wireless. Only a few months ago we were members of a holiday party burning ourselves happily in the sun on the French Riviera. Jean looked very chic then in a bathing dress with 'J.C.' over her heart. It seems years ago.

Early to say yet, but the new searchlight crowd don't seem quite up to the standard of Mileham, Farr and Reeves. But then new boys seldom are.

*Tuesday, 28th November, 1939*

Suggested to Keith on the phone to try and fix Evans of the *Broke* as Naval Correspondent, Major-General Swinton as Military Correspondent and C. G. Grey as Air Correspondent. Still going through all the motions.

A lovely morning after the storm. Stayed in the country till lunch-time and came up to town via Brighton.

*Wednesday, 29th November, 1939*

Tony Gibbs had a courteous but evasive reply from Hore-Belisha, dealing with the points of his letter.

Busy day. Tried to get Evans of the *Broke* to be Naval Correspondent. He is on the Admiralty list but will do occasional articles. Also wanted General Swinton (who is broadcasting well), but *Daily Mail* have bagged him for a weekly article.

Lunch of fillets of beef, Yorkshire pudding, sprouts,

mashed potatoes, and a marvellous rhum baba with cream. Nice to know that rationing is announced for January 8th. About time.

In the House of Lords yesterday at opening of Parliament famous old soldier Lord Milne urged the country to drop the idea that we are fighting only the German Government. Millions of German people are behind Hitler, he declares, and it is a very dangerous thing to teach an army that we are not fighting German people. He mentions the barbarism and brutality of Germans—'an innately brutal people'.

I begin building up a big feature story round Thyssen, exiled German steel magnate—'The Man Who Made Hitler'.

In the afternoon I fix article by Lord Milne. 'You can use all my speech', he says. 'It was intended for the world.'

Phoned Lottie to get German contacts for information regarding Thyssen and asked Herbert Seaman to come to town to co-ordinate all the information.

Lottie mentions Weiss, ex-chief of Berlin Police who escaped when the Nazis came to power, as a possible contact. I remember Weiss—Dr Bernhard Weiss, formerly vice-president of the Berlin police. I had dinner with Lottie and Nick before the war and Weiss and his wife were guests.

A dark, sorrow-eyed man, hard in his time, perhaps, but rather pathetic when I met him. A man who, by the very nature of his job and his loyalty to the Government in power, had of course to wage war on revolutionary rabbles like the Nazis before they came to power. Naturally, as soon as they came to power, they moved on his house to pay off old scores.

I remember his wife telling us the story, after dinner, in the safe exile of London, when (to us) all those horrors seemed far away—or even impossible. It was she who had had the premonition that something was about to happen. It was always the German wife, she said, who felt intuitively that all they held dear was threatened and about to be endangered.

Her story, she said sadly, was like so many others. Quite suddenly one evening she had said: 'Come, we must get out.'

There were riots going on all over Berlin, and she desperately tried to persuade her husband that he was in danger.

They decided to go then and there. Without even packing a bag, but taking a little jewellery, they hurriedly left the house. As they went out through the back door of their home, the front door was besieged by Nazi thugs.

Weiss and his wife managed to get to the station, and through to Czechoslovakia, with no other possessions. Then friends in foreign police departments got them to England. This is their home now. Weiss, his whole life spent in the police, is now running a small printing establishment.

Weiss won the Iron Cross in the last war, but when Hitler came to power he was deprived of his nationality and his property.

I also get in Dr Murphy, who translated *Mein Kampf*, to help on the Thyssen story. Andrew Kidd contacts two other Germans—one a friend of Thyssen.

Here is a joke going the rounds: A man named Parts joined the Army, and all his friends wondered why he was promoted to lance-corporal almost at once.

Lovely pictures of the Queen taken by Cecil Beaton and shown me by G. K. Thompson who is handling them. She looks regal, beautiful, and wonderfully sympathetic. What propaganda these pictures would make in the United States and other countries!

Snack at Savoy Grill. Ran into R. S. Hudson—Overseas Trade. Still up against his export troubles: 'There's always a bottle-neck somewhere,' he says with his tired, charming smile. 'If I could get the raw materials I'd be all right. The markets are there.'

In the evening to the Garwick Theatre to see a dreadful thing called *Eve on Parade*. Supposed to be a show. But the house is packed on this close, beautiful moonlight night with a smelly, sweating audience.

I stick it for twenty minutes and then get out into the cool of Trafalgar Square. The theatre, the audience, and the sordid show of unattractively undressed women in the

glare of the lights, seen through a thick screen of stale tobacco-smoke, is like a leering Hogarth picture.

*Thursday, 30th November, 1939*

To the dentist—two fillings. Hairdresser. Whitey, my manicurist, Seward, my barber, in their usual vein—charming, leg-pulling.

I've got an idea for an Army newspaper and start to plan a dummy. Looks like more work, but I think it's worth it.

•Frightfully busy, so had some food sent up from the canteen (boiled beef and carrots—a difference from yesterday) and ate it at my desk.

Wilf Nolan still off ill. The Thyssen story is building up well and should make a good series.

Herbert Seaman has done a good article on conscientious objectors.

Russia has invaded Finland, and latest reports say there are innumerable bombings of towns—many casualties. Stalin has certainly adopted the Nazi technique. Any kind of international morality seems to have gone from the world.

## II

*Friday, 1st December, 1939*

SUNNY morning, soon to give way to clouds and wind.

Walked to office, knowing that a long airless day lay ahead.

Met Sir John Anderson. He was once Governor of Bengal and was shot at, I'm told, several times without turning a hair. He is shot at quite frequently nowadays in the House of Commons, still—apparently—without turning a hair.

Yet beneath that rugged, almost pompous Scottish exterior, I suspect that he has all the Scotsman's plenitude of doubt and self-questioning. He looks like a genial, imperturbable rock, and sends questioning glances at you from odd, disarming eyes; a bit parsonish, a bit school-masterish, a bit of a complacent bore.

Tubby, with the odd, frail-like legs of most tubby men. I always wonder why they don't fall over, like children learning to walk.

He makes his points with gentle, insistent stabs at his open left hand, as though he were perpetually 'vamping' a piano. Small, pursing mouth in a jowlish face, he looks, with a cigar in his mouth, a bit like Churchill; and a bit like Cedric Hardwicke in his happier moments when he gets warmed up and the wary look goes out of him.

A pretty tough egg, with all the inherent weaknesses, I imagine, that compel him to be tough. He is responsible for Air Raid Precautions.

In the evening to a film, *Disputed Passage*, at the Plaza. Dorothy Lamour. Grand, if taken with a chuckle throughout.

*Saturday, 2nd December, 1939*

Had a farewell drink with Drysdale and Bill. 'Dry' goes off tomorrow to the Pioneers at Clacton. 'Sweden Mobilises' is our front page. Lord Milne's article is headed 'Brutes'. The first instalment of 'Thyssen: The Man Who Made Hitler' runs across a right-hand page.

*Sunday, 3rd December, 1939*

Started to pl.t. extra rooms in Diana's doll's house, and now, on *Sunday, 10th December, 1939*—a week later, I am trying to catch up with diary. A busy, wet, black-outish week. A long letter from Drysdale, who is in the seventh heaven at being in the Army again. He expects to be in France within a month.

A tart letter from Philip Gibbs saying he is resigning because the *Sketch* isn't using his stuff, and the *Chronicle* is re-writing it! (An enthusiastic sub did that, trying to make the thing look like a WAR.) Anyway, it meant three telegrams to the front—and a letter of apology and explanation.

Don't know if it has worked yet, as Gibbs has not replied. But in the meantime I have fixed up Field-Marshal Lord Milne as a weekly commentator on the war—just in case Gibbs does go.

What else? Went to see the Marx brothers in *At the Circus*. Not a patch on some of their other films, but funny in spots. Also to the Gate Revue with Heywood after a spot of dinner at the Ivy.

I am settling down to being a civilian.

Lunched with W. S. Morrison, the Food Controller. Scotsman. Keen, forthright. Might make a good Labour Prime Minister—if he weren't a Tory. Talked about rationing in the last war.

Public attitude is gradually changing from the 'over-by-Christmas' optimism to a tempered realism. Finland is upsetting a lot of people. Lead the paper this morning with latest news of Russian; on Finnish front: 'STALIN MASSES MILLION MEN'.

A lot of people who would like to have a go at Russia



would love to make capital out of latest events—but my attitude is definite and unequivocal and stated clearly in my leader today.

### OUR REAL FOE

Attempts are now being made to sidetrack this war—to persuade us that the real enemy is not the one we are fighting. Let us not be deceived. We are making war on Germany; we are not yet at war with Russia, and may never be. We must not be turned from our task by demonstrations of fireworks elsewhere.

There can be no condemnation too great for the brutal, cruel and ruthless aggression of Russia against Finland; but if Hitler had not invaded Poland, Stalin would not have tried to invade Finland. Hitler showed the way, and it did not take much showing. It must have been obvious to everybody that a great, well-armed country could always walk into a country that was not fully prepared to fight. Only by the grace of the big countries could the little countries exist.

That may be bad news for the neutrals who have not armed themselves, but it is not news to us. We, as a little country, know that if we were unready to fight we could not exist for a year, or for the space of one campaign.

Finland is proving a handful for Russia, and so we applaud. It is good to see a little nation standing up and fighting for herself.

Meanwhile, our job is to get at the author of the whole bad business. Hitler started it all by refusing to be a good neighbour. Before we look in any other direction we must put him out of business.

Our purpose and that of our French and Polish allies is to show that aggression does not pay. When that purpose is accomplished aggression from every quarter will cease.

It is not going to be easy. In the last week three statesmen have tried to tell us what we are up against. Lord Halifax has warned us against under-rating the strength of the enemy and against expecting a collapse of the German home front. He has repeated what the *Sunday Chronicle* has been saying for weeks.

*Monday, 11th December, 1939, to Monday, 18th December, 1939*

This is getting a bad habit. I'm obviously losing interest in my diary—mostly because, I think, I resent playing the part of a blasted civilian, and I began it expecting to chronicle the excitements and horrors of war.

But I'll try to go on doing it—and over a drink at home listen to a Sergeant on the searchlight squad telling me (he was in the estate business before the war): 'It's such a wonderful change from civilian life. No worries or responsibilities. You don't need to think. God, I'm glad I'm in the Army!'

What a story the *Graf Spee* was. This German pocket-battleship was hammered by three cruisers—*Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter*, and took refuge in Montevideo. *Exeter*, badly hit, retired, leaving *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Cumberland* to wait for *Spee*. Ordered out by Uruguayan Government, she scuttled herself. Her captain, Langesdorf, shot himself forty-eight hours later.

Tonight Churchill was on the air, speaking of the war at sea. He revealed that the 1st Canadian Division had arrived. He thus gave away a secret that the newspapers, in response to Government appeal, had withheld—and he did so, I hear, without reference to the Cabinet and on his own authority.

A bad slip. He should not alienate the newspapers at this stage, however strong a position he is in. The war has a long way to go, and Winston may have many a bad piece of news to report when he will be very glad of the sympathetic and understanding presentation of it by these same newspapers.

*Tuesday, 26th December, 1939*

This is definitely a bad habit. The unreality of it all is getting me, and I am losing interest in this civilian diary. My day-to-day entry seems to have gone by the board. I must try to get back to it. Even this twilight period of waiting is worth setting down. It must reveal something or other some time.

Lunched a week ago with Lord Stamp, Government's Economic Warfare adviser.

Stamp, softly-spoken, with a twinkle in his blue-grey eyes, extremely confident of himself. Talked about the Canadian troops and how he had seen that they had a 'jolly good meal'

on the train when they arrived. He is Chairman of the L.M.S. Railway.

Talk turned to exports, taxes, wages (the necessity of keeping them down to avoid inflation) sales tax, need for public education on the economic aspect of the war, railway accidents in Germany (owing to weakening rolling stock), and—of all things—railway wagons.

On the subject of railway wagons, Stamp is very interesting. The wagons are made by the railways and some of them go out on their journeys into the world and are never seen again.

He says: 'Some of my wagons are now in Russia! They were originally made for the L.M.S., sent to France during the last war, captured by the Germans, taken by them to the Russian Front and lost there, or left there during the peace.'

Stamp says pessimistically: 'I can't see how we're going to pay for this war the way we are going now.'

What else during this past week (in addition to Christmas)?

There was the first night last Wednesday, 20th December, of the new musical show *All Clear* at the Queens Theatre with Bea Lillie, Bobbie Howes, Adele Dixon. It should run quite a while. Bea Lillie rather self-consciously brilliant in several Coward sketches; and not nearly enough for Bobbie Howes to do.

Incidentally this is the first show I have been to in war-time that brought out all the old familiar West-End first nighters. Hitherto shows have been fairly informal things, with few people dressing; but they were all out in full evening kit for this show—the queers and the others—and dressed as if there had never been a September 3rd.

Had a drink with Hugh Cudlipp and Eileen Ascroft in the interval. Spoke to Gladys Calthrop, Charles Graves, Jane Gordon. Best thing in the show Bobbie's song of the balloon barrage over London, 'Croon to My Balloon'.

And what else?

Deanna Dufbin's film *First Love*. Marvellous fairy-tale nonsense—modern Cinderella stuff, but the right kind of gorgeous drug for these days. And there was a full house.

London is certainly becoming 'normal' again. More

people in the restaurants, cinemas and theatres. The shops are full of Christmas shoppers—almost like pre-war. The first demand of the new income tax rating.

Lunched with Phyllis Digby Morton one day during this week at the Ivy. Condoned with Bobby Howes on the smallness of his share of the show. Talked with Jack Davies, and Eric Maschwitz, on leave from his censoring in Liverpool.

We talk of the old days, especially of the night in Manchester when Eric gave a Lancashire hot-pot party in the Midland Hotel after the first night of his play, *Magyar Melody*. The play did not go so well, and took a lot of Eric's money with it. But there were good things in it, especially Binnie Hale and her song, 'Mine Alone'.

And what else this past week for the diary? Of course Gracie Fields' wonderful broadcast from an R.A.F. concert in France on Christmas Day.

She sang for half an hour without a break, not waiting for applause, but going from number to number, and getting the men to join her in the choruses. It was a brilliant effort, but made one feel lonely and out of it.

Christmas Day, 1939, was a happy, peaceful day.

We had a lovely party. During the day we slid on the ice on the dew-pond. I continued building Diana's house for her dolls, and had a session with John, firing his guns at his war harbour. The only sign of war was that we had goose instead of turkey. That's all.

Sgt Mileham came to tea today—Boxing Day. He has got his commission, but not yet his uniform. The children were delighted to see him again. He was so good to them on the searchlight station.

The Finns seem to be holding the Russians, otherwise the war is stagnant.

Philip Gibbs, home on leave, is coming in to see me on Thursday. I know he doesn't want any more of it.

As a relaxation, did article for Phyllis Digby Morton's magazine *Woman and Beauty* on 'That Other Woman in a Man's Life'. My war effort!

Got Bill Courtenay released from R.A.F. to act as my Air Correspondent.

Wednesday, 27th December, 1939

All right; here I am, taking up the daily diary habit again—although it is nearly 1 a.m. on Thursday the 28th. A beautiful full moon, with the dark and silent London streets silvered and shadowed.

Travelled up from the country about noon; cold and overcrowded train.

Arranged features for the paper—Eric Maschwitz' Life Story; poem from 'King's quotation' poetess; Man Behind Hitler; Gracie Fields at the Front; Lord Milne; André Maurois; Bruce Bairnsfather. Michaelson did a first-rate cartoon—1940. The o of the year was a rope noose that a frantic Hitler sees looming ahead.

The King in his Christmas broadcast quoted: 'And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied: "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way".'

The poet is discovered to be Miss M. L. Haskins, and I have arranged to run other poems by her.

To the pantomime *Cinderella* at the Coliseum—bad and, I thought, not the thing for children. Too much so-called spectacle, not enough knock-about fun. The children there seemed bored.

Show began at 7 o'clock, went on to 10.15. Bob Paterson and I, after food, arrived at 8.30. Left at 10. Best crack: Leslie Sarony asks orchestra for a note, is given a great crash and clatter of music and remarks, 'that must be General Goefing changing his medals'. No good tunes.

Copy of Gilbert Frankau's *Self Portrait* arrived. It is to be published on January 4th. I see myself mentioned once or twice in a kindly way 'because Jim was the first to commission a few articles after my (financial) crash'. I have always liked Gilbert. The book looks like an interesting read.

To bed with the *Daily Worker* and *No Arms, No Armour* a novel by R. D. Q. Henriques. Pretty awful.

*Thursday, 28th December, 1939*

Philip Gibbs came in and I finally persuaded him to carry on as war correspondent. He goes back to the front about January 10th. Pretty grim about things, however, and is furious that so many people seem to know so much of what is going to happen when the Blitz comes.

Again talks about our need for a defence in depth and is fearful of our move into Belgium if Germany attacks.

Asked me if anyone could suggest how we should proceed to win the war. Spoke of general army feeling that the real war would start in the South East of Europe through Turkey, Palestine, Persia to India.

He was bitter about the 'Press Conducting Officers' at the front. Apparently one conducts you everywhere, even to Mess dinners, etc. Not quite to latrines, however, he reassured me. Like having an S.S. guard with you. Some of them were journalists of not too important a rating before they got their majorities and captaincies.

He mentioned the reluctance of the French to fire on Germans and shake things up. British officer visiting French front and seeing Germans moving about unmolested on No Man's Land said: 'I'd like to take a pot at those fellows.' The French were furious at the suggestion.

Australian war correspondent, visiting French battery of big guns and having them explained, asked: 'Have these ever been fired?' Told 'No'. Asked if any harm would be done to let off a few shells. Angry French officer: 'You civilians are so blood-thirsty!'

Gibbs mentioned one battalion of Cheshires holding about *fifteen miles of front*—behind Belgians of course. And he was blasphemous about our tanks and armoured cars. 'We're using the same bloody things as in the last war.'

Also gloomy talk about young officers 'drinking themselves to death; but you can't blame them—they are so bored'. Thinks Hitler is going to let things stay as they are in the West. Not very enthusiastic about our army discipline.

Took him down to the Savoy where he was meeting Philip Inman, Chairman of Charing Cross Hospital. Gibbs tells me Inman gave up £2,500 a year when he became

Chairman. Nice to see Inman again. Have known, and liked, him since 1924.

Lunch: Elsie Cooper.

Back to office. Miss M. L. Haskins will write us a weekly poem for next three months. Large number of requests for her work—America, calendars, Christmas cards, etc.

Phone call from Marion Masters, whom I haven't seen for five or six years. She says: 'I have been in America and Australia since I saw you last and now I am back in England and want your help to get out again as quickly as possible.'

Herbert Seaman comes back from Field-Marshal Lord Milne—gloomy. The old boy can't see the war coming to a quick finish and doubts if morale of people will stand real war if it starts. '1940 or a ten years' affair' is Milne's verdict.

Nice cheery day, with cold and snow and freezing streets and a most damnable black-out fog from 3.30 p.m. onwards!

Went to see Madeleine Carroll in film *Husbands and Lovers* or some such title.

She has improved. American film producers have certainly brought out what talent she has. Looking at her in the three-quarters-empty theatre, my thoughts went back to the time when I danced with her on this same Plaza stage behind the screen she is now showing on—when I took her to meet Marlene Dietrich on Marlene's first visit to England.

Taking her home to her flat afterwards she told me happily that she had now saved enough money to give her some kind of an income—'whatever happens about screen jobs, stage offers, or anything else'.

*Friday, 29th December, 1939*

Didn't start off so well either. Whitey, who manicures me, has been telling me from time to time of her R.A.F. boy friends. Of one in particular, who has always been jolly, smiling and happy.

He was in the first raid on Kiel with his pals, and afterwards they all bought a car and came up to London to celebrate. Then full of high spirits. Now he has been home on leave at Christmas and is a different boy.

'He's years older', she says. Only twenty-one, he now looks like thirty. He's lost ten of his pals, his closest one last Wednesday over Heligoland.

Met Lord Macmillan, Minister of Information, and a more unsuitable one I can hardly imagine. A very fine type of man, the best type of Scotsman, with a logical brain and a love of literature and music. But he seems to be bringing a lawyer's mind to a job that isn't logical or orthodox and I think I see why the Ministry of Information isn't functioning too well. He doesn't seem quite to apprehend the *nature* of his job, although he has a lively imagination and a great understanding of humanity.

A benign but shrewd Scottish lawyer. I can just see him in a Princes Street club after lunch, deep in an armchair, entertaining his cronies with his interesting stories, dealt out in a warm Edinburgh dialect.

I asked him why the American magazine *Life* could publish German pictures of the bombing of the Forth Bridge and none of our bombing of Kiel or Heligoland or Borkum. He said he was asking Winston the same thing! But surely he should see that it's done himself.

He wandered out of propaganda talk as soon as possible and told two stories—one about the Pilgrim Trust and how it came to be started. Apparently the idea was born at a dinner at Claridges. John Buchan and Macmillan were with an American, Ed Harkness, who came originally from Gallo-way in Dumfriesshire.

Harkness said that he had always had a love for Britain and a great respect for what Britain had done for civilisation. He went on diffidently to say he would like to help any cultural activities or institutions in this country that might have suffered through our costly first war effort and our subsequent financial crisis.

He quietly suggested handing over the sum of £2,000,000 and giving Macmillan and Buchan a free hand to do what they liked with it—either in principal or interest. Macmillan suggested forming a trust, and John Buchan wrote the first two paragraphs of the deed.

The other story was about the Advocates Library of



Scotland. Macmillan had written an article about its need of money. Alexander Grant, the biscuit manufacturer, asked to meet him and offered him £100,000.

'I've got a £100,000 by me that I can spare', Grant said. 'Is that any good to you? You see, my business has done well and I put a lot of money in War Loan—never taking the interest—and I want to do something with it now.'

Macmillan, overwhelmed at the munificence of the offer, asked Grant to come and meet the Prime Minister.

'Now, now, I don't want to meet people like that', Grant answered. 'That's your job. I'll just give you the money.'

There was only one condition—that there should be no other subscriber. Grant wanted to provide the necessary money himself. Later he gave another £100,000.

'I've not had much education', he said.

But he had a great love of scholarship.

This was the same Alexander Grant who, when Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister, made the Premier a present of a very expensive motor-car to help him in his duties.

When the gift was discovered the Prime Minister's critics and enemies naturally made much of it. MacDonald was foolishly reticent in dealing with the question in the House of Commons. He might so easily have revealed that Grant and he, as two ragged little boys, played in the Highlands together, and that the two men had a great love for each other.

To a film, *The Rains Came*, in the evening, with Myrna Loy in it, and Tyrone Power and George Brent. Pretty awful. The Loy person does not appeal to me. But I appear to be in a minority of one.

Dinner with Keith at Café Royal. Ran into Paul Dehn and Jimmy Agate.

*Saturday, 30th December, 1939*

Drysdale came into office. Embarkation leave. He expects to be in France in about ten days. We had sandwiches and

coffee in the office while the work of the newspaper went on. We plan fun next week.

No news except the possibility of a call-up of men from twenty-three to twenty-eight years of age. Hitler and Goering breathe fury against Britain as their New Year messages to German people.

A bite of food and home to the country at night. The lane so frozen over, car could not get up. Reversed several times. Finally, wrapped rug round wheel and got up, but ruined rug.

Had asked More-Belisha, Churchill and Kingsley Wood for New Year messages. Not very exciting replies, and nothing worth publishing.

*Sunday, 31st December, 1939*

Frost on the snow. Sledging with Diana down the hill slope. Soldiers from the searchlight doing likewise.

It is three minutes to midnight as I write this, sitting up in bed. It is foggy outside, and in the distance the warning fog-horn at Newhaven or somewhere along the coast is the only sound in the silence. There will be no hooting of ships this night, no uproarious welcoming of 1940.

1939 is just going out and here are my thoughts on it:

Well, it all happened. More or less as a score of journalists and writers—and one particular politician—had been warning the world, and this country especially, for the last three years. It could have been avoided. It should have been avoided.

We are in it now, and we ought not to be out of it this time until it is settled for good. Yet, I still feel that if Chamberlain and this Government could get out of it, go for the old bogey of Communism rather than Hitlerism, they would. There are signs of a peace offensive via the Pope, and perhaps Roosevelt. What's the betting Germany doesn't slip out of her just punishment yet? Well, there goes 1939. Hello, '1940! Or Hell, 1940?

# I2

*Monday, 1st January, 1940*

A FROSTY and sunny opening to the New Year. Went sleighing with Diana and Sheila (John in bed with cold). Marjorie, setting out later, unable to find us in the snow. We used the soldiers' sledge and went whizzing down the hill. But oh! the strain of pulling it uphill again!

In the afternoon put snow chains on car wheels; started making new sledge, painted red. 'The Scarlet Flyer' it is to be called. Was given an apple-pie bed (holly in sheets and pillow) by Diana and John.

*Tuesday, 2nd January, 1940*

A beautiful sunlight morning. Reluctant to leave the hill. Lane skiddy, but chains on rear wheels saw us to station. Sheila and I had coffee in railway refreshment room. To London via Brighton, taking in all nearly two hours.

Pushed work forward because I wanted to take the children tomorrow to see *Where the Rainbow Ends*.

Letters of criticism from readers awaiting me in connection with our pictures of Jews being forced to clean walls, streets, etc., in Warsaw.

One picture in paper showed Jews clothing marked by two triangles. Another picture in another page showed same Jews marked by three triangles. Readers suggested pictures were propaganda and not genuine.

They were quite genuine. The mistake had happened

because the retoucher—a temporary war man—had been told to 'bring out' the triangles, meaning bring them *up* (strengthen them). He had painted them out altogether, thinking we meant 'take out the triangles', been corrected and asked to do the job again. Realising at last what was wanted, he had not bothered to wash the print, but put three triangles in on top of paint, forgetting that there were only two triangles in the picture under the paint.

I dined in late and alone. Looked in for ten minutes at the Windmill Theatre. Packed with men—especially troops—who like nice naked girls. I don't blame them.

*Wednesday, 3rd January, 1940*

Nice to meet the children in Town. They came to the office, met some of their friends among the boys, and we had lunch in Holborn. *Rainbow Ends* at the Holborn Empire not quite so satisfactory to them as last year because we sat in the circle (I had wanted them to see better, but they did not hear so well).

St George, also, was not the golden-haired actor of last year (he is now in the Navy) and the spot-light consistently missed him, which was not happy. Also he missed his sword scabbard once, and that too was uncomfortable. But apart from that, it was fun to see it all again.

But I see where Hitler got his idea of catching them young. I caught up with this piece late in life—last year, to be exact—and was surprised by the blatant nationalistic propaganda pumped into the very young.

Had a drink with Beverley Nichols at the Garrick Club. This in response to my hint about a possible mission being sent to U.S. to try to counteract certain anti-British peace-at-Hitler's price activities. Beverley is suggested as a member.

Had dinner at Café Royal. Met red-haired Jill Naismith again—once Ramsay MacDonald's chauffeur. Place full of service men. Went to Regal cinema—*Mr Smith Goes to Washington*—with Jean Arthur and James Stewart in film. Wild, but amusing and good entertainment.

Place packed. Said 'Hello' and 'Happy New Year' to

Henry Horne (with attractive girl) and Donald McCullough (with Mayfairish-looking party of people).

*Thursday, 4th January, 1940*

Lunch with Drysdale. He is off to Liverpool on Saturday a.m. Long chat. Drysdale always has the story of the moment. This is it, apparently: Fish salesman found business very dull; put placard in window: 'Owing to Hitler, business is littler.' Didn't help much. Put in another: 'Owing to Hess, business is less.' No good. Put in substitute: 'Owing to Goering, my daughter is whoring.' Bigger sales immediately. Then he trumped it with: 'Owing to Himmler, I'm doing similar'.

He told me stories of half-a-dozen officers he'd heard about likely to be cashiered because of drunkenness. One, tight as a drum, took a shot at his own unit. And one—a regular Captain—saying to Acting Major: 'You're only a bloody Second-Lieutenant anyway'. Spirit of the old Army seems lacking something somewhere, or is it that enemy of all soldiering—sheer boredom and tedium—that's the root of all evil?

Took the children to Silly Symphonies at the Cameo Theatre. Then dinner in the Strand. Overheard girl waiting in lounge being asked by Canadian soldier if she'd join his party. Looked as if she would like to. But her own boy arrived at that moment. Life.

*Friday, 5th January, 1940*

Lunch with Philip Gibbs and Hore-Belisha. The world's best war correspondent, full of privately-expressed fears and apprehensions, and our most provocative and democratic War Minister.

Gibbs, arriving first, gave a quietly lively description of the utter boredom of the Western Front.

I looked forward to seeing Hore-Belisha again, and I was interested to see what would be his answer to the evening papers' attack on him on his policy of granting commissions

only to men who have served in the ranks. The Army (as represented by some of the Generals) is certainly up against H.-B.

When he arrived—very late—he looked more tired than when we met before, not so assured, a little strained.

[Note later: I could not guess, of course, that he had been delayed writing his letter of resignation to the Prime Minister, and that the next morning was to bring the sensational news that our most successful War Minister—the man who had brought about more army reforms in two years of office than in any previous generation—had been ‘bested’ by the generals who resented his drive and determination.]

The Prime Minister had offered Hore-Belisha the post of President of the Board of Trade. He had declined.]

Philip Gibbs gave his impressions of the British Front. He was seriously concerned about our defence ‘which is no defence at all’, and asked why a strong line had not been built in the natural French ridges and hills thirty miles in the rear.

‘At present we are in the muddy level plains. We have only pill-boxes. Any heavy artillery could blow them to bits, and I am sure that if the Germans came through Belgium they would over-run our defences very easily.’

He told the story of an officer who, anxious to see how strong the steel doors of those pill-boxes were, took a rifle, stood away a hundred yards or so, and fired. The bullet went through the door as if it had been a piece of cheese.

‘The tanks we are using are old things—the tanks we were using in 1917. Last November, when a German attack through Holland was expected and our mechanised units went right forward, ready to advance through Belgium, there wasn’t a single British officer who expected to come back.’

Someone, agreeing with Gibbs, said: ‘The whole of our building trade is idle. We have a million and a half unemployed. We could transport large numbers of them to France and build an emergency defence line now when the opportunity offers.’

Hore-Belisha said a little bitterly. ‘The British tank is not something you produce in the mass. It is a work of art,

subject to all kinds of modifications, and every part hand-made. We haven't nearly enough.'

He explained that until September 1938 (Munich) a large British Expeditionary Force had not been envisaged as a future possibility. Consequently the machinery for tanks was not available.

I shall never forget that lunch. There was about the Minister a suggestion of disappointment, if not defeat. He has had a tough journey.

In the evening went with Keith to the London Casino. Pink champagne and pleasant talk of the last week-end Keith and I had on the French Riviera just before the war, and of Alan Fairley and Jean Colin and other people we had met there. Then we danced with two of the dance 'hostesses' and—just one of those coincidences—one of them had just come to London from Alan Fairley's dance club in Glasgow. The Casino pretty dull, but good enough to forget the war.

*Saturday, 6th January, 1940*

Hore-Belisha resigns. Universal suspicion that the 'gang' have got him. I got Liddell Hart on the phone at Totnes (where he was recovering from 'flu) to do an article, and Gibbs to describe yesterday's lunch, and Maurois to do the Government. Lord Milne (probably one of the old ones H.-B. had annoyed) touched up his weekly article and brought it up to date by saying resignation would not affect war.

Liddell Hart's article led the front page under headline: 'Why Hore-Belisha Went'. It said: 'During the spring and summer there were frequent reports in military circles about differences of opinion—more over ways than over means—between Mr Hore-Belisha and the ruling soldiers. The resignation did not come as a surprise.'

Gibbs said: 'I had a personal reason for astonishment because on Friday I was lunching with him and he talked of our war-time problems and his own military policy. He was smiling and cheerful. Never by one word did he give a hint that he would be out of office that very night.'

Front page picture shows 'crowds surging round H.-B. in Whitehall'.

*Sunday, 7th January, 1940*

Rain and mist, but fun with the children, still home from school.

*Monday, 8th January, 1940*

A glorious morning. To hell with war and work. Our first ride since the war, over the downs with Atkinson's ponies in the cool air and sunshine. .

Rolled the lawn in the afternoon. Made a sledge after dark. Listened to 'Monday Night at 8', and the news on the B.B.C. Finland is still holding out against the Russians.

The first day of rationing.

*Tuesday, 9th January, 1940*

Jimmy Hodson came in after lunch, just back from the Front on leave. He says the men are magnificent, but bored, and shares Gibbs' view that a defence line on the ridge behind us would be an advantage in case of break-through. 'But every bloody private seems to know', he says bitterly, 'that we go forward when the time comes. My God!'

The Staff idea apparently is that when Germany starts we go forward at once whatever the situation.

He was illuminating on the troops attitude to the Press. In some cases war correspondents have been hissed. Can't say I blame the troops, considering the blah that's been published by some papers.

Like Gibbs, he is not very keen to go back.

This letter from Robert Blatchford *re* Army discipline:

8th January, '40.

Dear Mr Drawbell,

I don't know how much you know, but some bare facts have, quite accidentally, come my way. In case you don't know them I send them on in confidence. Any mention of names might ruin the friend who told me.

The real trouble is slackening of discipline. On the barrack-room walls of a big camp is a notice that duties



shall be arranged by the N.C.O. in charge. That means that men to go on guard or picket or fatigue are not to be selected by rota but by an N.C.O.

What happens is this. A corporal comes in and says to a private: 'Would you like to go on guard?' And the private says 'No'. The corporal then asks another man.

Men who should be up at 6 a.m. come slouching in to breakfast at a quarter to eight.

This kind of discipline means inefficiency and inefficiency does not win wars.

Now this slackness which is meant for kindness is bound to be resented by men like Ironside and Gort. But rightly.

No railway, or munition works, or bank, or cricket club could be run successfully under such slackness. A regiment is a machine and must work smoothly. Proper discipline is a safeguard to the men of all ranks in an army.

If you want to get at the facts go, or send a reporter, to the camp at B——. I see the Bully Bottoms of the Labour Party are already barking up the wrong tree.

Yours sincerely,

R. BLATCHFORD

# 13

*Wednesday, 10th January, 1940*

**B**UGHT Noel Coward's long-short story, *Kindness of Mrs Radcliffe*, for the paper.

Lunch with Beverley Nichols and General Gough.

Gough, a rather small, red-faced, mild, friendly man with blue eyes, rather appealing to you to like him, a diffident, hesitating manner, not too confident in speech—a fluttering and rather dear old lady anxious for her tea. So you might think. But he was the leader of our 5th Army on that awful 21st of March, 1918, when the Germans launched their terrific attack against our weak and unprepared front.

The responsibility of this little kindly man must have been appalling. On his shoulders fell the full brunt of the task of fighting a rearguard action.

What he must have gone through and suffered! His retirement from the army, his partial eclipse, and [years afterwards] his final vindication.

You look at him to see what it has all done to him. It has left no mark that you can see. He might never have been in uniform. A kindly little accountant, perhaps, tut-tutting about the lateness of his suburban train, but never a General in command of an Army.

But you soon see the toughness behind the kindly face. Talk mostly about army, weapons, etc. Gough would like to see infantry equipped with a sawn-off machine-gun, like the gangsters of Chicago. More useful in attack.

(*Note written later: In May 1940 we were to discover that the Germans had been thinking along the same lines.*)

Gough talked calmly of war, 'throwing a division in here' or 'a division there'. Discussed *Graf Spee* . . . 'the German crew was too young. They had never seen men killed. They were sick at the sight. They couldn't stand it.'

I thought Beverley was going to be sick over the table as I caught his eye.

Gough told story of his visit to King of Belgians after first war, and the King's remark: 'I'm doing all there seems left for a king to do nowadays—unveiling war memorials.'

Gough's stories turned to the Boer War. 'We pursued the enemy till tea time', being his favourite story. I was right about the old lady waiting for her tea, anyway.

But a very tough 'old lady', this one.

Drysdale off to France.

*Thursday, 11th January, 1940*

Lunched with Hugh Cudlipp.

Spoke to Lloyd George also lunching in Savoy Grill. Looking well.

Cudlipp savage about Churchill, his view being that Churchill should have resigned on Hore-Belisha's resignation; there would have been a split in Parliament and a row in the country, resignation of Chamberlain, and Churchill called by King to form new Cabinet.

We went over to Rules afterwards to drink coffee with Phyllis Digby Morton and Eileen Ascroft.

Phyllis's story of a divorced husband, jealous of his ex-wife's new husband, sending her Christmas present of one or two things she liked, wrapped in black mourning paper.

Went back with Phyllis to her office. She told me about a woman friend of hers and a man now a Cabinet Minister. How for years he had phoned her in the middle of night when he could not sleep; how he leaned on her always for help and support; and how when she recently asked him to do some little kind action for her son he sent out a message through his secretary that he was too busy to see her.

Home to country in evening.

Read Beverley Baxter's new book *Men, Martyrs and*

*Mountebanks.* Pretty quick work after only four months of war. But Beverley is a first-rate journalist.

*Friday, 12th January, 1940*

Travelled up to London with naval officer. As usual Silent Service full of stories of mincs, etc. This one was twice torpedoed in the last war.

Malcolm Macdonald, a charming and able man, tells me a story about a debate in which he took part at a famous school.

Next day received letter from boy: 'I liked you immensely. Could you send me two copies of your father's autograph?'

Apropos autographs, a good story of someone asking Lady Simon for her autograph at a party. When she signed her name well down page, he wrote—for a joke—these words over her signature: 'I promise to pay (putting in his name) £1,000 on such a date for services rendered.'

She called her husband over. He read the note and took it from her.

'Have you promised?' he asked.

'No, John.'

'Well', shaking his head, 'it's the law—you'll have to pay. But I have the note and I'll keep it, and possession is nine-tenths of the law! So you won't have to pay!'

Dinner with Keith and Milne (Field-Marshal Lord Milne). I seem to be living with Generals.

Old man worried and concerned about the common gossip of what we do in France when Hitler attacks.

'Everybody in London seems to know our plans', he complains. 'In the last war no one knew anything: now everyone knows everything.'

Blue-eyed, courteous, 'interested in people'—a fine old chap. I like him very much.

*Saturday, 13th January, 1940*

R.A.F. fly over Austria. A survey flight. Lead paper 'R.A.F. Make Greatest Flight of the War.' Belgian Army leave stopped.

I print three German air pictures of Britain published in American magazine *Life*, showing docks at Liverpool, Dover, Tilbury, with bold headline: "This is Britain—by the Nazis: Where is Kiel—by the R.A.F.?"

*Sunday, 14th January, 1940*

Lovely cold day in the country. It has been a fortnight of sunny cold days.

One of my girl reporters telephoned me late tonight at home.

'Could I possibly have Tuesday off?' she asked. 'I'd be so awfully grateful.'

'Of course', I said, 'but I hope there's nothing wrong.'

'Oh no. Nothing *wrong*!' The words seemed to tumble out of her mouth. I could hear that she was breathless. 'I'm getting married! My boy's leave ends on Wednesday and we'd love to get married before he goes back.'

I hadn't known that this girl had a fiancé.

'I know it's sudden', she said over the telephone now, 'but I couldn't really let you know before. We only met five days ago, at the beginning of his leave! Isn't it exciting?'

It is. It's exciting and thrilling, and very brave. It's the way, one feels, that life ought to be taken. On top. I hope this girl will be very happy. She deserves to, for she is a sweet girl, sympathetic, understanding, loyal. I know this: if anyone can make a 'go' of it, she will. She'll put everything she's got into making her marriage happy and successful.

And she'll need to, because I think she's starting off with a big handicap. I wonder if she knows just how big?

As I put down the telephone, my thoughts went out instinctively to a friend of mine in the last war. One night he, too, said to me: 'I'm going to be married tomorrow. What do you know about that?'

We were both very young—we should still have been at school instead of in an infantry regiment. We had both managed to bag leave at the same time. It was exciting to hear about his marriage. He had the happy knack of taking life in his stride.

I met his wife for the first time at the wedding. She was the only daughter in the house where my friend was billeted in the south of England. She was charming and gay. We were all very gay and happy, and made a merry party. They had known each other only a few weeks. They made an extraordinarily attractive wartime couple.

Their brief life together during the war was rather like a film. My friend was off to the Front soon after the wedding, and they had only snatched glimpses of each other during the years that followed. When he came home on leave they had no real home. Sometimes they stayed with her mother; sometimes they put up at an hotel.

But always they couldn't see enough of each other, they couldn't cram into each day enough fun and excitement. Like most other people at that time, with death in the air and danger in every day, they took what they could of life with both hands.

When the war ended something of the glamour went out of it all.

Millions of people—my friend included—came back to reality. He had to begin all over again. He had to build up a life from which years had been slashed. It was a task that confronted millions. It was a task that could have been tackled by any young couple who had real knowledge of each other, real understanding, real confidence in each other.

It was not very long, unfortunately, before these two attractive people discovered they were almost total strangers.

They knew practically nothing of each other. There had never been that long, steady growing-together which is the very backbone of a mutual life. They were intolerant of little habits, where knowledge would perhaps have made them sympathetic. They were impatient at finding out that the film-like beginning of their union had no basis in its continuance.

It wasn't so much that they grew apart as that they had never really grown together. They misfired.

The wartime atmosphere which had sustained their attraction for one another had gone. The uniforms had gone. The gay risk and hazard of life had gone. The brief, unex-

pected meetings had gone. The slower tempo of life had found them out.

They have been married twenty-six years. They are still married. Their life together has not been a great disaster, because both of them have the quality of loyalty, but it has been a great disappointment.

They have always respected each other, and I am sure they have an odd sympathy for each other, because both feel, deep down, that they were the victims of something beyond them—something in the air, something in the life of the time, something in the human make-up that responds to risk and reaches out, uncaring, to challenge Fate.

But what a thing to challenge!

*Monday, 15th January, 1940*

Finished making sledge. Diana and John did dress-rehearsal for miniature stage of *Where the Rainbow Ends* with dolls and costumes. Very ingenious use of dolls.

John asked me: 'Daddy, how can I make some money?' He wants a shilling to buy a film reel. We discuss various projects and I pay him threepence for painting sledge. Very secret 'man talk'.

All leave stopped from British Expeditionary Force following reports from the Low Countries. In Holland and Belgium army leave stopped and Belgium calls up thirty-five thousand more men. Emergency meeting of the Dutch Cabinet at The Hague. Movements of German troops near Dutch and Belgian frontiers.

*Tuesday, 16th January, 1940*

Didn't sleep well.

Monica Dickens' new book is well on the way, and looks very promising indeed.

Intensely cold: heavy snowfall in the afternoon.

*Wednesday, 17th January, 1940*

Dora Russell came in a.m. seeking advice as to where she can get money for her school.

She evacuated her school just before the war, took other school when war declared, and immediately had epidemic of scarlet fever and diphtheria in her school, involving her in heavy additional expenditure. I suggest Lord Macmillan and The Pilgrim Trust.

She does not look as well as she did when last I saw her at her school at Beacon Hill. It was a warm sunny day—in contrast to this very cold one—when I called on her at Beacon Hill. How sturdy and well she looked then.

What a game woman this wife of Bertrand Russell has been. She was one of the very brave pioneers in modern education and her Hampshire school, where the boys and girls did practically anything they liked, came in for much comment and criticism.

'Most people don't appreciate that the child is an individual who has to have contact with other child individuals like himself,' she once said to me. 'They *will* insist on children following lines of conduct which are alien to natural child development and which are, in the main, lines of conduct devised to give the parents an easy and selfish existence.

'The result is that all of us spend the greater part of our adult lives clearing up, if we can ever successfully clear up, the mental messes which were begun in childhood.'

All her life is a fight. There is great courage in her eye.

'How do you do it?' I ask.

'It's the children. The children keep me going. I live in them. That's why I never give them up. They are the motive of my life. I would be lost without them.' Her eyes light up. 'And it's lovely to have my own four.'

Two of them are in America, but two are with her at school.

'My boy of nine was reluctant to let me even come to London' she says. "I don't think I should let you go", he told me.'

She has been disappointed in some of the comrades.

'I'm not so fond of some of them nowadays. Socialism's



all right, but some of the people who preach it are all wrong.'

The *Daily Express* announces that R.A.F. pictures taken over Germany are to be released.

Hore-Belisha yesterday in House of Commons took the line we anticipated in paper. Quiet speech.

General Swinton, 'Eye-witness' in the last war, phoned me wanting information *re* our 'Hitler's Terms' article published in the paper.

A revival of the Marx Brothers' film, *Duck Soup*, at the Classic—the best thing they have ever done.

*Thursday, 18th January, 1940*

Income tax—8s. 9d. in the £—is going to play the devil with my balance. Visit to bank.

Frances Rodney came in, looking like a hot-house plant in the midst of a grim winter. Very exotic and furry with a splash of colour in her scarf and big artificial orchid somewhere about her navel. Wise woman, she prefers to remain feminine in a world of silly war women getting into slacks and all kinds of odd unsightly clothes. It's always the women whose figures can't afford to be draped in trousers who rush into them first.

How very knowing she is. Man doesn't want a womanly 'pal' these days; he is so used to living amongst men. He wants something soft and cuddly and womanly to feel or caress and go to bed with.

Dora Shackell came in just afterwards. She is going to Paris as usual for me to cover the first wartime collections of women's clothes!

The war is gradually fading into the background. It is the lull before the storm. 'We are living in a fool's paradise,' said General Swinton on the phone to me. I think he will prove to be right.

Herbert Seaman, full of influenza, off to do Lord Milne's article with Bill Courtenay (whom we got out of the Air Force) to help.

Dinner at Café Royal. Half an hour at the Windmill Theatre and Prince of Wales afterwards.

Nice story of a wealthy newspaper proprietor's chauffeur, on tap at all hours, deprived of his Sunday afternoon holiday in order to take boss's family to some big war social binge, and protesting about it. Told tersely: 'There's a war on, you know.'

# 14.

*Friday, 19th January, 1940*

NEVILLE Chamberlain is smaller than you would expect from newspaper photographs which give the impression that he is rather a tall lean man. Not tall, but lean most certainly. There is nothing of him. No head, no shoulders (rather pathetically sloping away from the neck), no body. The head particularly is small and shrunken.

An undistinguished-looking man. A bit school-masterish, perhaps, but completely negative. If you met him in the street you would scarcely notice him. If he held out a hat to you, you would perhaps drop a coin into it, still without noticing him.

But after a time in his company you are aware of a certain resolution in him, particularly revealed in the eye, which is determined and, at times, almost savage. A dogmatic kind of person, fighting hard for his beliefs, and yielding ground reluctantly even when proved wrong.

He is certainly master of himself. A quietly controlled person, showing nothing at all of the enormous load on those frail-looking shoulders. He looks at you directly in conversation, takes thorough stock of you. Answers while still looking at you, and sticks to the point.

He is almost a full stop in conversation, giving practically nothing away, adding little in the form of elaboration to an answer. Typical: Reggie Simpson, trying to draw him out, asked: 'Were you very impressed by your visit to the troops, sir?' Chamberlain in very firm, definite tone, 'Yes, I was.'

And nothing more. An answer, certainly, but one that gave no idea of the nature of his feelings or the scope of his impressions, or even the character of the troops by whom he had been impressed.

One or two things about him: He reads all the morning papers. He eats well; at lunch he drank some hock; smoked a cigar afterwards.

He is still strongly convinced that his appeasement policy with Italy was the right policy. 'I think events have shown that we were right.' Looked round challengingly (with resolute eye) while saying this. Might have been the House of Commons.

I got out of him that he expects Russia to make way for Germany on the Rumanian border so that Germany will have direct access to Rumania for purposes of invasion or threat.

Doesn't expect Hitler to go through Holland.

Chamberlain on Hitler: 'He certainly struck me as a man whose nervous strain might increase as the war progresses, but I saw no trace of lunacy in him. Nor of the amazing magnetism which so many people talk and write about. Not a bit of it. I thought his eyes were anything but magnetic. Not eagle-eyed at all. Rather dull, and a little odd in fact. He struck me as a very ordinary person. When we went upstairs on our meeting at Munich he led me to a most uncomfortable sofa in front of a table with a decanter of water and two glasses. He did not even offer me that. The sofa was so wide that if I sat on the front of it, I could not lean; and if I leaned I sat so far back on it that my feet were off the floor dangling in mid-air. He eats nothing, of course. Lives on spinach, I think.'

On Ribbentrop: 'A most unpleasant person.'

On Goering: 'If there is no bombing the Germans have certainly not refrained from humanitarian motives. He will bomb when it suits him.'

I think I'd probably back Chamberlain against Hitler—but only in the old peace-time type of diplomacy of the last century.

(Note: Several days afterwards Chamberlain asked one of us: 'What sort of impression did I make?')

To see Leslie Howard in the film *Escape to Happiness* in the evening. Ordinary.

*Saturday, 20th January, 1940*

Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary, speaking at Leeds, says he would a hundred times sooner be dead than live in a world dominated by Nazis. Churchill in broadcast says war would be shortened if small neutral nations stood together with British and French Empires against aggression.

Changed paper to lead on it: **BRITAIN WARNS NEUTRALS.** Churchill: "They hope the storm will pass before their turn comes, but it will not pass."

*Friday, 26th January, 1940*

A week later than previous entry. Awful cold, snow and frost. The worst weather in living memory. Must be hell in France, without those blankets.

Anthony Eden, the Dominions Secretary, is a very prepossessing person. I have always been attracted to him, but he lost some of my sympathy by not resigning at the time of the Hoare-Laval pact, which proposed to carve up Abyssinia between Italy and The Emperor.

Now, meeting him again, he wins me over with his charm, his obvious sincerity, his boyishness, his sense of humour—and his wearing a soft-collared shirt! Far from being a dandy, he dresses casually—but I should say that any clothes look good on him.

He drinks whisky with his food, and is confident and enthusiastic about his job.

Of the Economic Conference, he says smilingly: "One of the few major catastrophes of recent years for which I was not responsible!"

He is full of stories. On his first meeting with Hitler: "He had only just got into power then. He came with Goebbels and Goering to a British Embassy party. They had probably never been to such an affair before. I remember Lord

Cranborne at my side murmuring: "You wouldn't think these three could start a revolution".'

Eden described how afterwards on the same evening, when the tongues were looser, he became the 'blue-eyed boy' with the Germans because he had been a 'Front fighter'. How they had got together—as old enemies do—and discovered they had fought against each other on the same front at the same time. 'Awfully silly, you know, but the Germans are like that. You can only get them really enthusiastic and warmed up when you talk about fighting, or guns, or war, or battleships.'

Eden on Hitler: 'I found Hitler an odd contradiction. When he was stating a case—and I remember he was making out a case for Germany on disarmament—he missed no important point. He produced a plan and argued for it with great skill and conviction. He had got everything, and it all sounded extraordinarily plausible at the time. Of course he would never have stuck to it or stood by it, but at that moment he spoke as if all his future was pinned to it.

'And then he mentioned that he had got a cottage or something at Berchtesgarden, and suddenly I became aware of the curious and contradictory mystical quality of the man. His eyes lost their sharpness and became vague and dreamy as he slipped out of himself talking about the mountains and the sky and the view. I sensed then, I think, a dangerous combination of characteristics.

'He invited me and my wife to stay with him at Berchtesgarden, but the Foreign Office frowned on the idea and it never came off. Things might perhaps have been different if I had been allowed to go. You never know.'

Of his second meeting. 'It was different then. I met him, with Sir John Simon, in Berlin. Hitler had begun by then to develop the technique (which he later was to perfect with such dire consequences on the rulers of Austria and Czechoslovakia) of having messages brought into him while we were with him.

'One of the messages, if I remember rightly, referred to some Germans who had been ill-treated in Memel. It was probably quite untrue, and had no doubt been concocted 'n

the next room through the wall, but its effect on Hitler was startling and instantaneous.

'We had been discussing things quietly. Now the atmosphere was changed and charged. Hitler rose from his desk. He glared at us. His eyes were like those of a tiger. He stormed about the room, shouting, his arms waving in the air.

'We sat still in our chairs, quietly watching him.

'He roared at us: "What would you do if these poor Germans were Englishmen?"

'Somehow or other we answered, or avoided the question—I cannot remember. But I cannot forget that Simon and I sensed, in those moments, that we were in the presence of something menacing and unpredictable.'

Eden, who was very successful with the Russians, can still be objective about them—and amusing. He had gone to Moscow to negotiate a pact with Litvinov.

He laughs at the memory:

'I made the mistake of coming to an agreement with Litvinov on the first day about the wording of the Agreement. I should have known my Russians. We then argued for days. On the very last day of my visit, Litvinov produced the wording of our statement and more or less said: "Now what about the announcement?". There was apparently just a word or two that required altering. And that meant that we had to go through the whole dreary business once again.

'Still, it was an Agreement, and I'll never forget the night in the Moscow Opera House, when we entered the old Czar's box, and the Russian orchestra played the Internationale and the National Anthem. There was great enthusiasm among the crowd.' He pauses: 'But when I returned, not everybody here was so pleased.'

Eden on Stalin: 'He is a mystic, a recluse; almost ungettable. When we spoke of Hitler I vaguely sensed that he did not hate him so much as *fear* him. But it did not impress itself on me sufficiently at the time.'

Eden's sense of humour came back when he talked of his triumphal march to the station at the end of his visit, along crowded Moscow streets.

'Now, I thought, is some disgruntled fellow's chance if he wants to get rid of some bloated capitalists! Here we are, open to the lot of them! Suddenly there was a crash behind me and a noise of rushing feet, and shouting. This is it, I thought. I longed to see what was wrong, but luckily I remembered that an Englishman never turns round!

'When I got into the train and asked Cranborne what on earth had happened, he told me that he had fallen over his umbrella!'

We talk of the night Hitler marched into Austria. Eden was in Monte Carlo, and in the streets an Austrian dashed up to him, with tears in his eyes, crying, 'Save my country!'

That same night I was at some very gay ball in London—Covent Garden or Albert Hall, I can't remember which. Harry Heywood was called to the phone from his editorial office. When he came back he gave us the latest news about Austria. 'The eve of Waterloo', someone said grimly. 'Come on, let's dance!'

It's announced today that the bacon ration, beginning Monday, will be increased from four ounces to eight ounces per person weekly. The war's over!

*Saturday, 27th January, 1940*

Hitler chooses the man to rule Britain. He is Bradford-born William Bohle.

*Tuesday, 30th January, 1940*

German bombers attacking East Coast shipping and light-ships.

War Office issues first list of British Expeditionary Force casualties—757, of whom 719 died, twenty-four were wounded, one was missing, and thirteen killed.

I'm beginning to get lazy on this diary.

But how could it be otherwise? Last week I sent Dora Shackell to Paris to cover a Fashion Show! 'Paris says SIMPLICITY', our headline said last Sunday, and then this nonsense: 'Charm and flattery are the keynote to new



fashions in Paris. A new lovable, entirely feminine woman is the ideal'.

*Wednesday, 31st January, 1940*

Nick, my doctor, speaking:

'A lot of people—as fit as it's possible to be—are feeling tired. Men more than women. It's not strain; it's frustration. Men who had a taste of the last war.

'They expected this war would be just the same for them—into uniform and off to the battlefield. Danger, leave, new comradeship, new way of life, direct contact with the war, the satisfying feeling that they were having a hand in it.

'And it hasn't been like that at all for many people.

'No change; the same job as in peace-time; no uniform; no stimulation of belonging to an army or a navy or an air force. No mixing with the boys engaged on the same tough job, which you know will end when the war ends. Just civilians.

'Half my men patients come to me with the same tiredness. Actually they're fit enough to be in the Forces. The trouble is that they want to be, and aren't.

'For a lot of women, of course, it's been the greatest tonic in the world. They've escaped from a whole world of everyday domestic drudgeries—and from their boredom and consequent ailments. They're doing a job of work. They're important. They're actually *necessary* to someone or something—and to a woman that's the most important thing in life.

'There's no tonic like it. It doesn't matter that the thing they're necessary to is the assembly shed of an aeroplane factory, or a ward in a hospital, or a hot and noisy canteen. They're necessary and needed in a way they haven't been needed for a long time.

'But here again, with the women who go on in the old jobs because they are vital jobs doing essential work, I find the same sense of frustration and tiredness as with the men. It's tough on them. But it's a remarkable thing because it shows how much service—service in a common cause, I mean—means to the human make-up.'

*Tuesday, 6th February, 1940*

Another gap in the diary.

Announced that rationing of butchers' meat begins March 11th. Ration will be as a value reckoning—1s. 10d. a week for each person over six years of age, and half that for children under six.

Nice story of wealthy society woman seeking the aid of an editor friend of a popular newspaper for some charity she is running. Editor agreed to help, and with her own fair hand she wrote the copy, entreating his readers to spare the odd 'fiver' for her good cause.

The sub-editors, who knew something about life, changed it to five shillings.

'Why did they do that?' she asked her editor friend, when the paper appeared.

He tactfully pointed out to her that working-class people had no 'fivers' to spare.

'Working-class people!' she retorted. 'Surely there are no working-class readers of the *Daily So-and-So*?'

*Saturday, 17th February, 1940*

British destroyers intercepted German prison ship *Altmark* and rescued between three hundred and four hundred British seamen who were being taken to Germany as prisoners. Exciting story tonight. The office really looked like a newspaper office. Prisoners were members of crews of merchant ships sunk in South Atlantic by *Graf Spee* before Christmas.

*Altmark* crept along Norwegian coast, keeping close in. She took refuge in fjord yesterday and in darkness was followed by destroyer *Cossack*. Coming alongside, our sailors boarded *Altmark*, yelling 'The Navy's here!', and after short fight rescued prisoners battened down.

This is the stuff to give them; the whole thing stirs the blood. You could feel the tingle of it in the office, as we tore up the front page on each edition.

*Tuesday, 20th February, 1940*

Herbert Tingay and I had arranged to have lunch together. We were both busy, and wanted to get back to our offices in

the shortest possible time. Just like thousands of other busy men in London.

We were assured by the restaurant on the telephone that there would be a table 'almost immediately'. In a few minutes we were in the foyer of the place, in the company of at least fifty other business men—all waiting for tables.

For three-quarters of an hour we—and they—waited, drummed our fingers, sipped at a drink. We recognised some friends, a big-wig at the Ministry of Supply, an officer at the Air Ministry, an important man at the Admiralty—all betraying those unmistakable signs of worry and impatience that lead eventually to dyspepsia and bad work.

As time passed and a few people gradually obtained tables, others glanced finally at their watches and decided against waiting any longer.

'Must get back to the job', we heard one man say. 'I'll have a biscuit with my tea to make up for missing lunch.'

At long last we secured a table in the vast restaurant and gratefully looked about us. It might have been a scene in peacetime. Parties of women at most of the tables, dawdling over cigarettes and coffee, shopping parcels against their chairs. We thought of the men still waiting in the lounge.

No, this isn't a tirade against women being allowed to eat in public. Nor even a plea for male preference. Every one of those women may have been an energetic war worker revelling in her first day off for months, and richly deserving every moment of relaxation. Only they didn't quite look it.

It is remarkable that so many middle-aged women are adrift in the big cities these days, eating in the restaurants, and it is certain that millions of work hours are being lost up and down the country because of them.



## PART TWO



# I

THE next phase of my diary, like that of the whole situation itself, is confusion.

The stalemate which set in during February and March, 1940, was evidently reflected in my own mind and probably that of millions of other civilians, and gradually my efforts at recording my own experiences and reactions tapered off.

Apparently, however, I did make some effort to put down hasty notes of some people met during this period, and on the 28th of April there is this desperate effort to catch up with events that had now begun to out-pace even their recording—at least by me.

*28th April, 1940*

Two months later. There has been so much to do since February.

On February 11th, we made newspaper history. For the first time in British journalism a Sunday paper was printed simultaneously in London, Glasgow and Manchester. Then I went down with 'flu (everybody seemed to have it) - a very bad bout with soaring temperature. That put me out of action for some time.

A few odd entries about events during this period tell their own story of contrast:

*28th February, 1940*

People are getting alarmed about spies. Paper has a lead:—**SPIES: THE ENEMY INSIDE BRITAIN.** 'Nazi Ears Wide Open for Secrets Revealed in Casual Chatter: Government Warning.'

*10th March, 1940*

A woman stood up among hundreds of silent pacifists who packed Queen's Hall yesterday and sang the National Anthem. Not one joined her.

*17th March, 1940*

Lady David Douglas Hamilton, formerly Miss Prunella Stack, leader of the Women's League of Health and Beauty is expecting a baby in June.

Having been acclaimed the 'Perfect Woman', she is determined to have the perfect baby.

'Now for the Real War', writes Lord Milne.

*24th March, 1940*

A lovely photo taken specially for us by Cecil Beaton. 'Spring in London'. Crocuses in Hyde Park.

Now Norway and Denmark have been invaded. The second battle of Narvik saw the navy sink seven Nazi destroyers. Our lead on April 14th: 'HOLLAND AND BELGIUM FACE CRISIS'. Speed-up of Britain's manpower.

We are having a grim time in Norway. Supreme war council meeting in London, April 28th.

On May 5th our diplomatic correspondent wrote: 'Hitler is making a desperate bid to finish the war this summer. Hitler has gone berserk. He will out-Hitler himself in the next few weeks.'

Here, in my diary, are some notes on various people during this period:

### CECIL BEATON

A lot of his usual fashion photography being no longer required, and so leaving him more time for other work, I arranged with him that he should take one special photograph for our paper every week.

I get on well with Beaton. He is sensitive, surprisingly shy, abundantly capable. What a joy it is to see a real artist at work—whether it's painting a picture, taking a photograph, cooking a meal, decorating a house. And Beaton is certainly an artist—and a charming and understanding one at that.



We stood at the window of my office, looking out on some very poor dwellings opposite, and engaged ourselves in imagining the lives lived by the people there. Beaton revealed his sensitive imagination and his depth of understanding.

Here is an interesting story arising out of our association. Beaton had arranged to take photographs of one of the Higher Up's of the war effort. The photos were taken in the Higher Up's office. Beaton brought the prints in to me as soon as they were done.

He put them on my desk without comment. I picked them up and went from one to the other.

They showed the Higher Up, in lovely lighting, in a pleasant room, sitting at his table. He was variously looking at the photographer, smoking, writing in a book. I looked rather intently at the last picture.

'What's he writing?' I asked.

Beaton explained. The quiet atmosphere of the Higher Up's office had surprised him. Expecting to find himself in a whirl of war, doors opening and shutting, bells going like mad, phones buzzing, Beaton had found himself in the cathedral-like quiet of the Higher Up's quarters. It was the end of the day. And at that time the Higher Up retired to his room and recorded the day's happenings in his diary.

I looked at the picture again. I turned it upside down, so that I was on the same side of the desk as the man writing. The open page of the Higher Up's private diary looked back at me.

I said thoughtfully, 'With an enlarging glass I believe I could read what he's been writing.'

Beaton stirred uncomfortably.

'I believe you could. In fact I've read a little of it *without* a glass. I'm in the most awful stew. I don't know what to do about it. I wonder if you would advise me.'

I sent for a magnifying glass and fixed it into my eye. Yes, part of it could be read—not a very revealing part, it is true, but a few words of opinion which at that moment might have provided useful material for a mischief-maker.

And very useful material indeed for Haw-Haw on German radio.

'I'm in an awful stew about it', Cecil Beaton said again at my elbow. 'He's such a charming man, and so honest and decent, I feel it's my fault. What am I to do?'

'Is this the only print of this one?' I asked.

'Yes.'

'Good. Telephone your studio now and have them acid out the writing in the diary on the negative. That should do the trick. The prints after that will show no writing.'

Beaton phoned there and then.

The Higher Up never knew. Beaton and I kept the secret to ourselves. Sometime, perhaps, over some official lunch, that Higher Up may be very amusing about photographers and journalists and their funny ways.

## THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY (COSMO LANG)

A very practical churchman. He took a glass of sherry, and the first subject to be discussed was money, and income tax, and what a job he has to make ends meet on his £15,000 a year, or whatever it is, after all the expenses of his establishment are paid.

He is very much the ecclesiastical politician. In fact he confessed that it was a toss-up for him between Church and politics, and when he chose the former . . . 'For the first fifteen years after I was ordained I could not bring myself to go inside the House of Commons.'

That was keeping away from temptation with a vengeance.

He wants newspapers to express and respond 'to the deep spiritual stirring in the people' aroused by this war.

## LORD CHATFIELD

Quietly matter-of-fact and pleasantly authoritative. Every inch a British Admiral. He looks you in the eye thoughtfully and speculatively while listening or informing.

Talks of the difference in the British and German methods in training and developing officers. 'We British encourage our officers to accept responsibility early, to leave a certain amount to their own initiative; the Germans work to a

detailed plan, allowing for every conceivable and inconceivable emergency.'

Seeing him again reminded me of a dinner in London at which Chatfield and Beverley Nichols were the important speakers of the evening. Chatfield spoke first, an orthodox, routine speech with nothing outstanding in it.

The reporters got up from their table immediately he had finished and went to telephone their story to their newspapers.

They got back just in time to hear the tail-end of Beverley's speech, far and away the finest of the evening, and one of the best Beverley had ever made—a sincere, reasoned, and at times quietly passionate statement on propaganda. The big gathering was cheering its head off.

The speech went practically unreported. It had been delivered almost impromptu and so there was no copy of it to give to the reporters who had missed it.

Chatfield's opinion of Germans: 'No German ship ever did anything but run away.' Airmen, too. 'They always hare for home.' Well!

## LORD WOOLTON, FOOD MINISTER

Strikes you as being a little too pleased with himself and his success in life, which has principally consisted of running a great department store.

Very much the spirit of big business. Describes how, in his Lewis' stores, he had inter-departmental loud-speakers so that he could address whole staff on occasions from his own room. Good idea in a way, but surely a bit robot-like? Must have given him a terrific feeling of being God.

And yet he is right on his toes. I remember many years ago after a visit to New York, I wrote an article in my paper on 'America invents a new God--Service'. It described all those enchanting things that the British visitor to U.S.A. used to find so new and refreshing— the hotel telephone girl saying to you when you make your first call of the day, 'Good morning, Mr Smith, it's a lovely day; the temperature in the street is 65°, so you won't need an overcoat today', and so on.

I had collected a dozen examples of these 'service' aids—

many of them extremely useful to the customer in shops, hotels, etc. They made quite an interesting article, and as soon as it appeared Lord Woolton—he was then F. J. Marquis—wrote me from Lewis' about it wanting more information about that kind of thing. He was the only British business man to bother.

He talks a lot about the personal touch in business, but does not forget his early days with a settlement mission in the Liverpool slums.

A curious mixture of a man—smooth, white hair, large pink face, neatly dressed. A bit unctuous, a bit of a clergyman. So much like one, in fact, that you expect him to talk adenoidish. And yet underneath, I should say, as hard as a rock.

## FLORENCE HORSBRUGH

Looks like a superior schoolmistress—the woman in charge of the early evacuation of London children. Nice Scotswoman.

She told me stories of the evacuation, one particularly pathetic. A little boy, the son of very poor parents, had been taken into their home by a wealthy, childless couple. They had given him everything—the best food, clothes, the most expensive and undreamt of toys.

After visiting him, his mother was sitting in the railway station to go back home, quietly crying, a cheap little toy in her hands. 'I bought it at Woolworth's for him', she whispered, 'but he's got no use for it now.'

Lots of evacuated mothers and children wouldn't co-operate with their new hosts, wouldn't eat the food offered to them. A very difficult situation in one home till Miss Horsbrugh suggested getting in a supply of fish-and-chips—when they fell to with a will! The food they had been accustomed to and understood. The problem was solved—at least temporarily.

Story of the Scottish evacuees who were taken for safety to the East Coast—where first German raider was brought down shortly afterwards.

And the poor woman evacuee who, after discussing her

problems with Florence, said: 'It's nice to 'ave met you, Miss; I 'aven't spoken to anyone of me own class for a week.'

ARTHUR GREENWOOD tells me that the balloons outside the Houses of Parliament have their own pet names among M.P.s. One is known as the Bishop of London, one as Lambeth, another as Herbert Morrison.

Greenwood is a typical Socialist leader, shrewd, outspoken, obviously a fighter.

'I haven't much use for property', he says.

Smokes a lot in conversation, incessantly lighting cigarettes with a match in his left hand.

He thinks we should let the Italians have it from the air if they come into the war.

## 2

### LORD LLOYD

**H**ERE is a lithe, likeable live wire. A man like a panther, full of taut restrained energy. Slim, dark, with black eyes. Tightly drawn skin, yellowish, over his cheek bones. Small dark moustache. A slit of a realistic smile. He is a Pasha—definitely. An F·hel M. Dell hero. A grim and engaging realist.

Talking of supplies: 'We've never had a great number of anything but politicians.'

He is not bitter, but crisply denunciatory of all that has gone before. Clean and suave in his city striped trousers and black jacket. When I lunched with him he drank nothing but coffee.

Talking of getting used to shocks, he said: 'You get used to anything. I've been used to Baldwin for ten years.'

He is quite sure that the country would have supported preparedness and armaments if people had been led properly.

'Why, Baldwin had more power in his Government majority than any other Prime Minister. But he was a miser of power. Everything he got went into the till. Every little bye-election that brought about another party victory was hoarded. He did not know how to use his great power. He hoarded it like a miser. The country could have been led if there had been a leader.'

He told me how once he went down to Bristol and addressed a huge audience of Conservatives, telling them the state of our defences, the need to arm and so on. The meeting appeared to be completely with him.

But Neville Chamberlain jumped up, just before the vote of resolution, and said: 'I warn you that if we do what Lord Lloyd wants you will all have to dig very deeply into your pockets to pay for these aeroplanes and guns. This re-armament will cost you a lot of money.'

That turned the tide.

He told me how, two years ago, foreseeing trouble with Italy, he drew up a memorandum suggesting that we should supply natives near Abyssinia (Sudan) with thousands of rifles ('Old things you could buy for tuppence-halfpenny from Mexico or Brazil'), and with eight white officers cause the Italians in Abyssinia a great deal of trouble at the right moment.

'Chamberlain did not actually say "No", but he passed on the memo to Simon, who "deprecated" the suggestion.'

Lloyd got up, in his lithe, springy way and helped himself to coffee. 'I'm a demon for coffee', he said.

Ballet is another of his passions. His British Council sent ballet (Vic-Wells) to the Continent.

'There is nothing cultural coming out of Britain', he says. A strange, dynamic, restless soul—very frustrated.

## LORD HANKEY

A kind of quiet little Mr Chips. The man who knows all the secrets of the British Empire. Told us about some Norwegians refusing to blow up bridges and roads during the invasion of Norway although it would have hampered and delayed the Germans. There are always the traitors.

## SIR. F. DORMAN SMITH

A shrewd lad if ever there was one. And a pleasant one, too.

There is a good, earthy 'damning and blasting' about him that is refreshing. We need some damning and blasting. But he strikes me as a good politician, too. His sharp, pleasant eyes watch carefully the effect of his sallies. He appears to be almost purposely pleasant and forthright. This one's no fool.

Has the usual tales of difficulties in getting materials (in his case swill-cookers, etc.) for agricultural work.

**RONALD STORRS, LORD ADDISON at lunch with LORD MILNE**

Storrs has grown rather cherubically old and plump. He is bespectacled, pink-faced, and has a rather old-maidish voice.

Addison made best remark: 'The only people who seem to carry gas-masks are people who go to the British Museum—to protect themselves from other people who go to the British Museum.'

**EARL DE LA WARR**

Has striking similarity in face, manners, speech, form of expression to Beverley Nichols. Were they perhaps at Oxford at the same time?

'You would have thought', he suggests, 'that between Allies the first necessity was to understand each other's language. French ought to be a compulsory language in English schools, and English in French schools.'

**SIR JOHN REITH**

Tall, calm, confident with that righteousness of the righteous Scot. But how did he ever become connected with propaganda? He would probably be the first to confess that this is not his line of country.

This odd, strong, ex-B.B.C. chief, now head of the British Ministry of Information, never reads the morning newspapers! When he gets to his office in the morning a 'digest' of the news in the papers has been prepared for him.

But reading news is a peculiarly personal thing—especially to someone who is going to make use of it in propaganda. It's the odd little news item, with the particular reaction that it provokes in one, that might be used with such telling effect against the enemy. The detached hand preparing a digest cannot possibly know what to select for a particular mind. All that can be prepared is a summary of general news.

Reith never reads the Sunday papers at all. 'It's not that I think it's wrong, or anything like that; it's just something I've grown up with.'

He does not even listen to the B.B.C. if he can help it.

He is probably a wonderful administrator, but I doubt if there is a real propaganda idea in his head. The finest



example of a good man in the wrong job I have ever seen. He could be used so well elsewhere. A typical Chamberlain appointment.

On the night before the day I lunched with him, the R.A.F. had dropped leaflets over Germany. He had not seen them.

His conception of his job seems to be reading up a lot of minutes. 'If anything happens, my department will tell me about it.'

But propaganda is *making* things happen.

### MAJOR ATTLEE

Here is a Sphinx. At first sight a quiet little *sal*low man, who might politely be taking your order for a new suit. He sits almost silent. Appears to have little personality and not much force.

But gradually he comes through, and when he speaks you begin to realise that there is more behind the eyes than you might at first think.

Quiet and convincing. A darker horse than appears at first sight. Will go far.

### MALCOLM MACDONALD

Very earnest and sincere in wanting to prepare the public mind in connection with the Government's policy in Palestine.

Very aware, too, of the dangers of our position if we do not carry out our obligations to Arabs as well as Jews. Mentioned that every Palestine Commission has made the recommendations we were now carrying out.

### THE DUKE OF KENT

Dinner with him one evening when he came to office at Lord Kemsley's invitation to see the paper printed. Beverley Nichols and Geoffrey Lloyd were there, and Madame Dalroy.

Duke in naval uniform. Slight, lean head. Nervously shy, eating very little. He gestures with his hands, and has an odd weaving up and down of his eyebrows. A bit precise in

his form of speech, but you never know in England whether it's a weakness or only the mark of the public school.

We started talking about love—of all things. Whether it was ever possible to 'win anyone back'. I think someone got this subject going at our end of the table by referring to Dalroy as the woman who had to deal with that kind of problem in her newspaper.

Afterwards conversation developed, the Duke proving modest and extremely intelligent. Interesting in his view that many of our great British industries had been started by refugees and exiles from other countries.

Lovely dinner—with the war a million miles away.

Lord Kellsley took the Duke round the building showing him printing presses, and at midnight there were drinks and sandwiches and we all settled down to more talk. He showed himself to be a keen student of newspapers and their odd habits (especially front-page 'streamer' headlines and the inappropriate pictures sometimes beneath them; we caught out the *Daily Sketch* beautifully with some examples from the files there and then in the office).

But the talk went on too long, and it was after two o'clock in the morning when we got away.

Nichols and I were dropping with fatigue.

'Do you realise the energy we've put into this evening?' Beverley asked me, sitting in the dark taxi in the deserted black-out. 'Six hours since I set out from home. I've probably talked about 15,000 words, if you remember that people talk at the rate of 150 words a minute. Well into the sixth part of an average-length novel!'

## ERNEST BROWN, MINISTER OF LABOUR

Round, jovial, twinkle-eyed, shrewd. But a bit self-satisfied. Incessantly raising and lowering his eyebrows in a very confidential way to you as you talk to him.

Humbert Wolfe, the poet, had just died. Wolfe, a civil servant, worked in the Labour Ministry, and Brown was on his way to the Poetry Society to pay tribute to him.

Brown said that Wolfe's book on National Service (in its original form) would have been the finest publication ever

put out by a Government. Told me how Wolfe wrote his poems in odd moments.

Brown was annoyed with Churchill because Winston in his previous week-end's speech had said that a million women would be mobilised in industry. That figure was, of course, the *ultimate* figure. Winston's speech had rather given the impression that a million were needed now. Trade Unions were furious.

Brown takes no liquor. He is a quite remarkable man. Every week-end for years he has given up time to talk in Brotherhood meetings. He fought in the ranks in the last war.

I remember Sir John Simon's story of an election campaign in Scotland to which Brown had invited him. Arriving at his station on a dark wet night, Simon took a cab to find the place of Brown's meeting. The cabby did not know where the meeting was being held.

Suddenly out of the darkness came a great booming sound, splitting the night.

'Follow that, cabby!' urged Simon. 'That's Ernest Brown!'

## GENERAL EDMUND IRONSIDE

Met him somewhere around the time Chamberlain announced in House of Commons withdrawal of British Forces from southern area of Norway.

We had thought for some days in the office that this was going to happen. One editor of one of the big news-gathering agencies, on telephoning to the War Office to ask whether rumours of the impending withdrawal were true, had been met with the demand: 'Who told you?'

Nobody, of course, had ever 'told' him. But you did not have to be much of a military genius to recognise the possibilities and intelligently anticipate them.

Shortly afterwards high officers of the War Office arrived at the news-agency office and grilled the editor as to where his information had come from!

Around this time, too, Herbert Seaman had called on Lord Milne to co-operate with him in the writing of Milne's usual weekly war article for the paper, and had mentioned

the possibility of our withdrawing from Norway. Milne laughed at him in disbelief.

'At six o'clock when they turned on the radio they got the news of the Prime Minister's statement in the House about the actual withdrawal.

Milne looked at Seaman incredulously. 'Where do you fellows get your knowledge from?' he asked. 'It's not right that you should know.'

Ironside is like a great faithful dog—something of the St Bernard about him. Quiet, loyal eyes. The honesty and integrity of the man is so absolutely obvious.

Showed little of the worry and strain he must be undergoing, and as I usually find with quiet, soldiering men, he monopolised the conversation. But he did so pleasantly and with good forthright soldierly language. A pity there isn't more of it generally.

And he has fourteen languages at his finger tips to be forthright in!

He gave us the usual and quite correct picture of Hitler, the aggressor, working on interior lines of communication, being at liberty to attack where he chooses, and we have to guess where.

'Have I to prepare an army with skis for Norway?' he asks. 'Or another for Holland and Belgium? Or another for the Balkans? Or another for the Libyan desert?'

His brief comment when asked about the position of the British Army at the beginning of the war: 'We had no army.'

Which is pretty near the mark when one remembers that thousands of men should never have been in the Territorials, and have been discharged since war to return to their essential war work. Forty thousand, I have heard.

Ironside uses his hands freely in conversation to illustrate his points, looks at you only fleetingly and then away, like a shy dog, and makes great use of pencil and pad to draw his ideas. Wears a watch on each wrist. His doodle designs on paper are like maps.

He mentions Sir John Anderson: 'I've seen him shot at', he says in his bluff, brusque way. He speaks rather quickly, in short machine-gun like bursts of talk. 'Shot at at very

close range. It takes a very good man to stand up to that. Anderson turned a bit white, but that was all.'

Ironside on people: Hitler—'An absolute coward.' Liddell Hart—'A misguided theorist.' Badoglio—'I know him well. He always sends me greetings on my birthday. He once told me that as long as he was in the Italian army Britain had no need to worry about Italy.'

Extremely interesting and forthright on the need of conscription, which would have supplied him with a cadre of officers and N.C.O.s.

Someone interposed: 'But the party was pledged against conscription.'

Ironside bluntly: "Then the party should have been changed."

Interesting on the ambitions of a subaltern joining the Army as a profession. He contends that no thought of an ultimate Field-Marshal's baton enters the subaltern's head. His aim is solely to be a good regimental officer, and at most perhaps a colonel of his regiment.

Ironside would not be drawn about the idea that a defence in depth should be prepared by the B.E.F.—that a great line far back behind our positions, say along the natural ridges, Vimy, etc., should be built in case of a retirement.

But perhaps he had in mind the criticisms of Philip Gibbs and other correspondents, and the memo sent by young Gibbs to the War Minister as far back as last November or December with its many criticisms, for he said: 'And some people found fault because the machine-guns in the pill-boxes don't fire straight but at an angle. Why, if any officer of mine aimed his gun straight out in front I'd have him shot!'

He then, with pencil and paper and great energy explained the theory of cross-fire, pill-boxes, etc.

He is naturally indignant about neutrals not mining or wiring their airfields in order to destroy them at any threat of an enemy landing.

"They will do nothing! Not a thing to defend themselves! And when it happens, they will call to us for help!"

When I asked him where he thought Hitler would attack, he said at once: 'He ought to go for Holland.'

# 3

*Friday, 10th May, 1940*

**I**RONSIDE was right. The party is over at last. Germany struck through Belgium and Holland this morning.

*Saturday, 11th May, 1940*

The war has swept into the office like a whirlwind. The whole paper goes by the board—every thing scrapped—and on this Saturday morning of destiny everybody is at action stations. This is it.

The news pours in.

**TWO BIG BATTLES RAGING:** 'On all fronts the Allies are falling back.'

**BRUSSELS AND LIEGE BOMBED.**

Three Socialists in Cabinet: Attlee, Greenwood, Alexander. Anthony Eden is War Secretary.

Every part of the paper is being remade, hour by hour—over cold cups of tea, swilling in the saucers, and forgotten sandwiches.

Beverly sits over his typewriter: 'The whirlwind is gathering momentum with every hour. As I sit here with the tapes ticking ceaselessly, the telephones ringing as though they were demented, I seem to see the map of Europe being torn to shreds by gigantic mailed fists.

'It is as though the room were awchirl with coloured paper; the tattered charts that represented the old civilisation have gone for ever.'

Lord Milne is writing a new appreciation of the situation: 'The German Plan to Smash Britain.'

Our leading article sounds new warnings, and goes back to our prophecy:

'Make no mistake, the Germans are going to hurt us as much as they can. Like other gangsters, being cornered they are going to try to shoot their way out with tanks and guns and bombs and everything they have.'

These prophetic words appeared in the paper on October 29th, 1939. Today they are coming true.

The news comes flashing through: 'R.A.F. ARE ATTACKING NAZI RHINE FORCES' just as we put away a feature page: 'Winston Churchill—'The man who saw it coming.'

Watching it all clattering over the tapes, and in the messages from correspondents, snatching at every latest scrap of information, one is aware of the world, somewhere out there in the night, engaged in its greatest crisis.

*Saturday, 18th May, 1940*

It has been going on for a week: Tonight the R.A.F. are trying to hammer it back:

GREAT R.A.F. BOMB RAIDS.

France recalls Petain: 'in her hour of destiny'.

Lord Milne writes on Gamelin's three-word message: 'Courage or Die'.

Our leader: 'Britain expects parallel with April 12, 1918.

'Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retreat. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight to the end.'

*Monday, 20th May, 1940*

Things look very grim. The Germans have overrun Holland, and the Dutch have capitulated.

The great anti-parachute and Fifth Column campaign is on.

Antwerp has fallen before the onrush of huge tanks and the new German technique of tank, dive-bomber and fighter attack.

The lesson so markedly successful in Poland seems to have been overlooked by Allied military command.

The Battle of the Bulge has been going on for a week. Gamelin has been deposed and Weygand appointed in his place.

Chamberlain has gone at last, and Hoare with him, leaving Churchill, as our new Prime Minister, with a fearful heritage. Tragic indeed that the responsibility of now getting out of our mess should lie with the man who did so much to warn the nation of its imminence.

Describing the going of Chamberlain, 'Atticus' in the *Sunday Times* says:

'What a week it has been! Gardens have blushed into loveliness, and the countryside is as gentle and as fresh as it can be only in England. But at Westminster there was lightning and thunder, fume, fury and violent storm. Though the level of the debate was high, there were features of it that were cruel, and left the old Mother of Parliaments wondering whether she had not let herself go a bit too much.

'Mr Amery should go down to history as Westminster's Exhorter No. 1. He, was once a journalist and can still think in headlines. It was he who on the Saturday night before the declaration of war cried to Mr Arthur Greenwood, "Speak for England!" Last Tuesday, quoting Cromwell's words, he shouted: "For the love of God, go!" So infectious was this newest Amery (ism?), that when the result of the vote was announced on Wednesday night, and Mr Chamberlain rose wearily to leave the House, a number of his enemies repeated them.'

I won several bets on Churchill's premiership. At lunch one day a month ago I said he would be Prime Minister within six weeks. Three people, relics of the appeasement era, took me on at once. They were still hoping that the crisis would keep Chamberlain in! God, how out of touch with public opinion and feeling some people are.

I phoned Robert Boothby telling him of the story being put about that Labour had agreed, in circumstances, to serve under Chamberlain.

Even on the telephone he sounded furious. 'You can take it from me there isn't a word of truth in it. It's being put out by the Chamberlain crowd, who are using the crisis



hoping to stay in power. You know: the old stunt about never changing horses in mid-stream.'

Ten minutes later he phoned back. 'I've been in touch with Amery, for our lot, Attlee for Labour, and Sinclair for the Liberals. And I assure you they will not serve under Chamberlain. The Labour people are furious at the story. They have been asked about it from several quarters.'

When I asked him if Churchill would be next Prime Minister he said in reply, 'Well, what do *you* think? My bet is he'll be P.M. tonight.'

He phoned once more confirming what he had said about Labour not serving with Chamberlain.

Chamberlain went out, broadcasting a very sincere message of loyalty to Churchill the same evening.

Churchill broadcast last night—May 19th—a grave warning of things to come:

'I speak to you for the first time as Prime Minister in a solemn hour for the life of our country. . . . A tremendous battle is raging in France and Flanders. . . . It would be foolish to disguise the gravity of the hour. . . . We must have—and have quickly—more planes, more tanks, more shells, more guns. . . .'

Met Sir Kenneth Lee, Director-General of Ministry of Information under new chief Duff Cooper.

Lee said that someone had suggested the idea that U.S. should give us her Army Air Force planes. I think it unlikely but see later that the idea has been canvassed in America and may lead to something.

God knows we need the planes. The weight of the German attack in planes and tanks is unbelievable—especially to our complacents who spoke so glibly in the early days of the wings dropping off the Messerschmits when they flew faster than 200 m.p.h. Our pilots are working night and day bombing and fighting.

Our wastage is about one in three to the Germans, but their numerical superiority seems to be definite and tremendous.

Beaverbrook (newly-created Minister of Air Production) appealed on radio to fitters in garages to go at once to.

aircraft factories and work there to speed up production. This after nine months of war, twenty-one months after Munich, four years after Guernica. God help us for a complacent and slothful lot of blind fools.

Lee talked of our propaganda in U.S.

I said I thought our propaganda should be based at this late stage on Fear—the fear of Americans for their own safety.

This note, sounded previous evening in Roosevelt speech, should be played on for all it's worth. American safety is tied up inevitably with our survival.

Someone asked: 'What should we do if France capitulated, our Air Force was wiped out and our Army beaten? Should we make peace or stand bombardment?'

There was a gasp. Some people have not even got round to the idea that we are in as tough a spot as that.

# 4

*Wednesday, 29th May, 1940*

I AM writing this on the night of May 29th, and nineteen days ago Holland was invaded and overrun, Belgium was invaded and we were drawn north to her defence.

The French were attacked at Sedan, the Germans made a break-through between us in the north and the French on the Somme, and rushed to the Channel ports.

Brussels fell, King Leopold of the Belgians threw in his hand; and the British Army, flung back, is at this moment encircled, both its flanks exposed, and fighting for its existence.

Yesterday was the darkest day of the war.

It has been three weeks of shock after shock.

The invasions. The surrender of Holland. The parachutes and tanks. The failure of the French. The dismissal of Gamelin and fifteen other French generals. The break through to the Channel. The defection of King Leopold.

Tonight *we* face the possibility of invasion.

Yesterday I went to Brighton. Hurriedly, machine-gun posts were being erected on the sea front, Army telephone wires strung up, roads blocked with barbed wire, old bedsteads, petrol and oil drums filled with earth. A new grimness has settled on Britain.

People sat on the front (enjoying their summer holidays!!) watching preparations for the coming battle. Sheila and I had tea at the Grand Hotel. It's all quite unreal.

I remember an old fire-eating General friend of mine and

his contemptuous opinion of the public. 'They call us soldiers bloody fools', he snorted.

Tonight comment is superfluous. The soldiers, after Poland, were unprepared for tanks; after Guernica had overlooked low-flying bombers; after Spain had never heard of the Fifth Column; after Russian experiments had treated parachutes as a joke; after any kind of defence at all, had forgotten fast-moving armoured cars.

Diana and John have been evacuated to Dartington Hall in Devon to be out of the way. Our home is right in the invasion area, three miles from the sea at Newhaven. Poor Diana; to be torn away from her school so soon after her operation for tonsillitis. She is very low about it.

Most of the schools in this southern and south-eastern area are evacuating, getting the children away to the west country.

*Wednesday, 13th June, 1940*

Paris is being besieged by the German Army.

Italy is in. Trust Mussolini for the stab in the back.

Effect on our people of strain. Inability to sleep—to concentrate. Depressed—heavy—no energy. A kind of mental paralysis. Especially in people, like ourselves, who are in touch with it all every minute of the day, and yet unable to do anything but record it. The frustration!

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Here are some notes on other people met about this time:

ERNEST BEVIN, MINISTER OF LABOUR. Just before I met him for the first time I had heard that when he was a boy he had read aloud to a blind man, and it was this reading that gave birth to his interest in politics and affairs.

He is stout, podgy-fingered, with eyes set in beds of fat, but a live wire if ever there was one. Something of the American business man about him. Forthright.

Speaks his thoughts honestly and straightforwardly, no matter in what company he is.

'I know there shouldn't be any recrimination or going back', he says to a group of us, 'but how any men could let things

get into the mess they are in is beyond me. They're awful. It makes you wonder what they were doing all the time.'

He is emphatic that Labour could not have served under Chamberlain—'or any of that gang'.

He says earnestly: 'I could not have taken office. If I had, Labour would have had nothing to do with me. This feeling goes deeper. They will never forget 1931 when we were betrayed by Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald and Snowden.'

Is impatient of red tape and the delays caused by red tape. Told story of bottleneck in air-engine works at a Midland town. One hundred and fifty men would have cleared the hold-up and let work proceed. Bevin suggested at once taking a hundred and fifty men from a railway works in the same town (they were working on locomotives not needed for two years).

Bevin was about to get on the telephone to have it done. Someone cautioned: 'But, Minister, there's been some correspondence about this.'

Bevin: 'Get me the file.'

In his own words: 'They brought me the file. I found out that the correspondence had been going on for five months! Five months! Five minutes on the telephone would have cleared it up. The hundred and fifty men just walked across the street from one works to another. But nobody could get it done. Nobody can use the telephone, apparently. It all has to be written about. There are dozens of cases like that.'

He has a plan for dividing up the dockers into four groups, so that when things really start and dock areas are bombed, the men can go to work in alternative ports if required.

Everything the man said was such sound sense, and he so obviously knew more about labour and labour conditions than anyone I had met so far in the war, that one wondered why in the name of sanity he had not been called in on the very first day of the war.

His tremendous and intimate knowledge is obvious. He talks quietly, a little wheezily, with great understanding and humour, letting out now and again a laugh like the slow escaping of air from a car tyre.

Three or four years ago he went to Chamberlain with the idea of building great underground food storage dumps in the congested industrial and munition-making areas so that they would be self-supporting in the event of dislocation during a possible war.

'Chamberlain wouldn't have anything to do with it. We had nothing to lose. These dumps would have absorbed labour. But no! Lord Woolton, the Food Minister, said to me the other day: "I'd give my right arm to have them now!"'

Dr HUGH DALTON. Big, blond, a bit like von Stroheim of film fame, with deep-set pale blue eyes gazing at you fixedly while his wide-mouth smiles. Deep chuckly voice. A bit of the sporting parson about him, very clean, very pleasant, ready to laugh. Turns his body right round to look at you.

His story of what was said of the Italian Navy in last war. 'The ships were all in port, and the admirals were all at sea.'

His story of the arresting of King Victor by mistake for taking photographs at the front during the last war.

Victor: 'But I am King Victor.'

His British arrester: 'That'll be all, you little squirt!'

SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Air Minister. Highland-looking, pale blue, deep-set eyes, high forehead, pale face, dark hair and eyebrows, wide mouth, full lips, slim expressive hands. A gentle-looking soul, but with the iron determination of the Scot.

He wears a deep stiff collar with angel's wings, like a church deacon or a town clerk.

Has a likeable, and I hope not only a politician's, trick of looking long and deeply into your face when talking to you, as if you were the one person in whom he is interested.

He was in the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers in the last war and served, I think, as Adjutant with Churchill—who was commanding officer of the battalion for a time. He is enthusiastic about de Gaulle, the French general (he was a colonel and promoted to general in the field) now in London appealing to all Frenchmen to fight on.

When we talk of the false security of the Maginot Line and its demoralising effects on the French, Sinclair's long fingers move expressively as he makes a point.

SIR WALTER MONCKTON, head of the Censorship side of the Ministry of Information. But by the time the war is over he will probably be on the Woolsack.

A keen, dark-eyed legal careerist. Has great charm and pleasantness and knows how to be attentive to women.

Virginia Cowles, the attractive American war correspondent, sat opposite him in a group of journalists, and they got on like a house on fire.

He made notes of most of the suggestions that were flung at him, readily and spontaneously. But his work has little to do with the creative side of propaganda, and I should say that he would be a pretty capable lad in his own job. In fact I know he is from personal experience.

He smiles agreement or amiable disagreement with everyone. Difficult to get behind those dark, shrewd eyes. He hides himself very well. He carefully conceals his own thoughts, probably even from himself.

Spruce, neat, brightly alert—a very good actor, this one, who enjoys every moment of the play.

Reg. Simpson's story of Duff Cooper, Minister of Information, being asked by the doorman at the Ministry for his pass.

'But I'm Duff Cooper', he explained.

'Can't help who you are, sir; even Sir Walter Monckton has to show his pass!'

A good story of Sydney Carroll, and told by himself against himself, publishing photographs of the editors of national dailies in the *Daily Sketch* and modestly leaving out his own. Sub-editor suggested that the reason is the *Sketch* slogan—'Only the news and pictures fit to print!'

ANDRÉ MAUROIS. He came over to London from France. I had already asked him, before meeting him, to write me an article on the spirit of the French people. He had made a wonderful broadcast.

Now standing with a few of us drinking sherry, his small,

rather portly figure in French military uniform outlined against the high windows, he answers questions and talks of his countrymen.

Utterly tired and depressed, he yet contrives to be quiet, charming, gentle. His voice is small, 'high-pitched, almost plaintively appealing. Yet he does not appeal.

He just tells us things, drawing the tips of his fingers together before his face sometimes as he talks. He tells the story of the ordeal of the French; he is not reproachful, but he says:

'You promised us thirty-three divisions; we got twelve. I walk through the streets of London today. There are fifty divisions of young men in civilian clothes in this one city alone. It isn't a question of manpower. You have the manpower. It is not being used.'

Will the French hold out?

A faint shrug of his shoulders. The charming cultured voice: 'It depends. If we can get enough help soon enough, we shall hold out. If we get more aeroplanes quickly from you and aeroplanes from America we shall hold out. But it must be quickly. It is not a matter of weeks. It is a matter of days. It may be a matter of hours.'

I suggest that Maurois, instead of being sent to lecture to people in our industrial centres, where we are beginning to realise the truth, should be put on a destroyer or a plane and shot over to the U.S. at once to tell the truth about our plight to the people of America.

*Saturday, 1st June, 1940*

Dunkirk. The British Army is out of France—saved by a miracle, by courage, by the Navy, by a horde of little boats, by the R.A.F. By some incalculable German blunder.

Lord Gort is home saying: 'We'll meet them again—and next time we'll win'.

This from the *New York Times*:

'So long as the English tongue survives, the word Dunkirk will be spoken with reverence. For, in that harbour, in such a hell as never blazed on earth before,



at the end of a lost battle, the rags and blemishes that have hidden the soul of democracy fell away. . . .

There, beaten but unconquered, in shining splendour, she faced the enemy. They sent away the wounded first. Men died so that others could escape. It was not so simple a thing as courage, which the Nazis had in plenty. It was not so simple a thing as discipline, which can be hammered into man by a drill sergeant. It was not the result of careful planning, for there could have been little.

It was the common man of the free countries, rising in all his glory out of mill, office, factory, mine, farm and ship; applying to war the lessons learned when he went down the shaft to bring out trapped comrades, when he hurled the lifeboat through the surf, when he endured poverty and hard work for his children's sake.

This shining thing in the souls of free men Hitler cannot command, or attain, or conquer. He has crushed it, where he could, from German hearts.

It is the great tradition of democracy. It is the future. It is victory.

*Saturday, 8th June, 1940*

It's all in the melting pot. 'BIGGEST BATTLE BEGINS' is our front-page streamer. Four hundred thousand fresh German troops on a sixty-eight-mile front to wipe out the French.

# 5

*Tuesday, 18th June, 1940*

FRANCE surrendered yesterday. I heard the news at Brighton where I had gone on my day-off to steal a swim. Lovely summer days just like those in the first days of the war last September. I was sitting in a café at Rottingdean when the waitress told me.

Of course the week-end in the office, with its back-stage rumours and information had prepared me for the worst. It was obvious on Sunday that the French were going out.

There were soldiers at Brighton on the beach; they were paddling, not bathing. A few were throwing pebbles into the sea. A good swim would have done them good. They seemed lost and purposeless, with no officer around anywhere. There never seems to be a platoon commander or section leader about.

Walter Winchell's crack in his American newspaper: 'Italy looks like a boot and behaves like a heel.'

Keith and I have played a little golf these summer nights to get away from the grind. Nobody gets called up. We are all waiting, waiting.

Churchill on the wireless—tired, bitter. And no wonder! But ending on a terrific note: "The battle of Britain is about to begin. . . . Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour".

Still no word of Drysdale. Hope he got out of France.

Jimmy Mellor came in to the office. He has had a marvelous time as a machine-gunner on a trawler.

Went to see *Present Arms* at the Prince of Wales theatre. Phyllis Monkman—George Gee—Billy Bennett—Max Wall—Evelyn Dall.

Saw Ginger Rogers in the film *Sunshine Days*.

Reading Freeman Wills Crofts' *Golden Ashes* and, for contrast, Jules Romains' *Verdun*.

Writing of Mr Churchill in the House of Commons, Harold Nicolson says in the *Spectator*:

'For him, at that moment, there must have been one thought which recurred in a spasm of unutterable regret. Since even if he were able to summon around him the whole choir of angels and archangels, he would not at once retrieve those years which the locusts have eaten. He told us, in Garibaldian language, that he had "nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat".

'Yet even his buoyant energy, even his incandescent faith, even his faculty of inspiring the dull with vision and the lazy with speed, will not immediately suffice to exorcise the quick demon by whom we are today confronted. Ultimate success is certain, now that he is at the helm. Immediate success is a boon which may come to us with good fortune, but which no wise man can expect.

'I returned to my rooms, and as a distraction from my bitterness I read some of the speeches which Winston Churchill has delivered since 1932. Again and again did he warn us that Germany was aiming at the mastery of the air, and that without one instant's delay we should prepare our jigs and tools. The locusts, all those years, had nibbled at the leaves of time; and today the very man who warned them, who denounced their silly optimism, who castigated their blindness, who begged them in fervent words to see clearly and strongly, is the man upon whom the fierce burden of their errors has descended with terrific might. He must indeed be a great man who is able to dismiss such frustrations from his mind.

'He sat there, resolute and unperturbed, listening to the speeches which followed; obviously moved by the affectionate and vivid tribute paid to him by Mr Lloyd George. There we had 1918 greeting 1941. It was a memorable sight. What memories of escapade and combat, of triumph and defeat, of loyalties and betrayals, of deep friendships and fierce animosities, must have passed during those minutes through his mind. In

his veins flow two hundred and thirty years of English history, and the destiny of his country, which he worships with so deep a passion, is now entrusted to his hands.

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'Often have I sought to discover the essential quality of this most remarkable man. Is it his abundant energy, his Elizabethan zest of life, his almost fifteenth-century *virtu*? Is it his versatility and the rapid variety of his many gifts? Is it a combination of will-power and imagination, of vision and tenacity? Or is the quality which has given such consistency and pattern to his adventurous life the simple quality of profound patriotism? I turned to a speech which he had made in April, 1933:

"We ought, as a nation and Empire, to weather any storm that blows at least as well as any other system of human government. We are at once more experienced and more truly united than any people in the world. It may well be that the most glorious chapters of our history have yet to be written. Indeed, the very problems and dangers that encompass us and our country ought to make English men and women of this generation glad to be here at such a time. We ought to rejoice at the responsibilities with which destiny has honoured us, and be proud that we are guardians of our country in an age when her life is at stake."

'It is indeed a privilege to fight under such leadership and in such a cause.'

# PART THREE



# I

THE tempo of the last part of my diary of this fateful year steadily quickens. The confusion period continues for a little time while grim truth emerges from the mists.

The world is changing in the new situation which confronts us and a disillusioned people prepares to face the future—and the enemy—alone.

Steadily out of the confusion grows resolution. In my own case, the diary itself seems to realise its new purpose. It takes up a more regular record of the momentous (and the trivial) events of the summer of 1940. The circle of the year is completed. It is Britain's turn now to 'take it', and here is a kind of running commentary on the lives we led during that period.

Reading it again, I live it again.

*Monday, 24th June, 1940*

I do wish that laziness, the incredibly wonderful weather, odd games of golf with Keith, and the awful inertia and paralysis that seem to have affected most people who have not yet a definite part to play in this chaos, had not prevented me from doing a complete day-to-day diary since May 10th, when the Germans began their drive through Holland and Belgium.

On the night of May 10th I wrote a single entry in my diary: 'The party is over at last. Germany struck through Belgium and Holland this morning.'

Since then it has been a period, for the waiting civilian at least, of the utmost strain and bewilderment—and bitterness. Every day has been full of it. Shock has succeeded shock until the brain is numb, sleep is difficult, and one is aware all the time of the menace pressing heavily against the heart.

There has been no period of relief.

The great and overwhelming attack of the German army with masses of tanks and planes; the capitulation of Holland; the ominous 'bulge' in France, with the break-through of the German troops when the French High Command apparently failed to realise the situation; the revealing 'only a miracle can save us' speech of Renaud; the removal of Gamelin and fifteen French generals; the surrender of Leopold and the Belgians, leaving our flank exposed; the great fighting retreat of the British and French; the fall of the Channel ports; the evacuation of Dunkirk; the onward sweep of the Germans down the coastline of France; the evacuation of our troops from Norway; the fall of Paris; the cutting off of British and French divisions at St Valery; the coming in of Italy; the last appeal to Amélie of Renaud; the new French Government's appeal for Armistice; and now—tonight, as I sit in a Glasgow hotel—the surrender of the French to Hitler's humiliating terms, and their discussions of peace with Italy.

All doubt about the fate of the French Navy and Air Force seems to be settled, but I am not so sure.

Britain is left alone to face the onslaught. What has all this meant to the people of this country?

At long last people seem to realise how badly they have been let down by our leaders. They cannot understand why the extent of the German threat was not understood and countered; they cannot understand why, after nine months, we had so little anti-tank equipment, so few planes, so small an army in France, so pitiful a military preparation here in Britain.

'What I can't understand . . .' has been the phrase on everyone's lips for a month. Why men of twenty-three or twenty-four, registered months ago, have not been called up. Why we have no rifles. No uniforms.



The bitterness is levelled principally at Chamberlain, but now, because we must find a foreign culprit, and because we have been used to other people fighting our battles with us, people are beginning to say: 'God, the French have let us down'.

Not bad for a nation that sent over to France only three hundred thousand soldiers in nine months of war, and our streets full of armies of fit young civilians longing to serve.

And through all these happenings the weather has been lovely—long, hot sunny days, still nights, with a lover's moon marking these middle nights of June.

But always nearer and nearer creeps the menace. It is on everyone's tongue now, in everyone mind. The people realise they are for it. Slaughter from the air on an unimaginable scale. How will they stand up to it?

Have they grown so soft in these last twenty years that, like the French, they will prefer peace—a Hitler peace—to effort and suffering? I don't believe it. For although there's bitterness, a bitterness that will one day express itself, there is also determination. It will be a fight.

Yesterday I was in Edinburgh, discussing mother's safety, arranging a house for her out of the capital, going into the question of sending the children to Canada under the evacuation scheme. People everywhere are making these plans, clearing up their family affairs, preparing quick get-away satchels of necessary clothing, food, etc., in case of air raids or invasion.

Crowds collect round the news-boards (now printed in chalk—just like the last war). People discuss the situation with strangers. There is a look on their faces that shows their troubled thoughts.

Peter tells me that at one harbour there are no soldiers guarding. If the vital mains cable was hit by a bomb, there is not a pair of rubber gloves in the place to handle it. Exaggeration, no doubt, but we are so unprepared in many directions that any story lends colour to the picture. There is now almost a masochistic pleasure in making our picture as grim as possible.

The streets are full of soldiers—young, lost-looking in their

battledress, purposeless, collars undone, pockets unfastened.

I talked a lot with one yesterday, travelling from Glasgow to Edinburgh. He is in an anti-aircraft unit. Young, married, two children. He started to tell me all the secrets of his unit.

'You mustn't tell me too much', I said. 'You never know who I am.'

In the last war the difficulty was to get a fighting man to open his mouth. Now you can't get him to keep it shut. To this day—twenty-four years after—I don't know how my own brother won his decoration at the front.

In Glasgow it was pathetic to see newly-arrived French and Polish soldiers strolling disconsolately about the drearily sabbatical Scottish streets. No places to go to, few cafés open, no cinemas, the people a little awkward at taking the first tentative steps to make them welcome. All has happened so suddenly and overwhelmingly that people are punch-drunk.

I spoke to one French soldier, with Jack Christie, and afterwards we decided to stir the Glasgow people up with a strong lead in our local paper.

The big air raids have started in the south, bombers coming over about a hundred at a time. Now I shall try again to keep this diary up-to-date from here.

Drysdale is safely home, coming back with the last batch from France. Have not seen him yet. I have tried again to join the R.A.F.

Ironsides is now off the Army Council.

Saw Mickey Rooney in *Judge Hardy* film with mother in Edinburgh. Am reading *The Ballet* by Arnold Haskell and *The Red House Mystery* by A. A. Milne.

Tapsell has joined the ship in which Jimmy Mellor is serving. He was last seen going off from the office with a suitcase and a very relieved look on his face.

In the office a big economy drive is under way. This is the breaking-up of everything. The paper is ten pages in size. Once more the old days—this time the old peaceful, war days—are over.

Knickerbocker, the American journalist, home from France, passionately anxious that we wake up, tries to terrify newspaper reporters with tales of Nazi tortures, especially

one about men being held up by feet and having testicles burned off.

Tea with Nick, Lottie, Anne. Nick, being a doctor, is realistic, if not actually cynical. He remarks on a stirring of interest among nurses when they hear about German prisoners arriving at hospitals. With the possibility of invasion, quite a bit of leg-pulling is now going on as the war reaches the 'when does the raping start?' phase. Overheard: 'The Government ought to issue pessaries to keep us from having German babies!'

Jimmy Hodson, back once more from France, bitter at tragic story of the *Lancastria* loaded with six thousand troops, being bombed for three hours, without retaliation, without moving, just taking it. One bomb hit her right in centre. Wounded troops shot each other to get out of the hell.

Eric Schofield told me story of an officer arranging about our troops coming back from Norway, saying to British and American newspapermen: 'Now then, you fellows, no matter what you may be thinking, I want you to pipe down. If Hitler were here you wouldn't be allowed to turn out your news-sheets at all.'

My train going back to London full of troops and officers. Conversation in our carriage of the three men, strangers, who discovered they each had had a duodenal ulcer. 'Speaking of operations. . . .' Lovely day, sunny, high white clouds.

Discussion on ability of our people 'to take it' when it comes. Everyone talks to everyone else now. The old British reserve is going. Reality is breaking in. Class values are going overboard.

We're all in it together. So we get closer together for safety. Feeling of quiet, last-battle exhilaration. There is a suppressed excitement in the knowledge that this time we've got to face what comes all on our own. It makes for a kind of picnicky relationship when strangers get together.

Lunched in dining car with Warrant Officer. His story of fifteen-year-old boy who walked forty miles to join navy. Had to be fifteen and a quarter. W.O. called up Royal Marine bugler.

'How'd you like to be that'? he asked. You can join the Marines at fifteen?'

The boy gave one look: 'Not bloody likely', he answered promptly. 'I want to be a sailor.'

At dinner I sat with an Engineer officer who had just parted from his wife, a 'nanny' who had just seen her fifteen-months-old baby off for safety to the United States, and a Wren, not in uniform, who had just said 'goodbye' to her sweetheart at Greenock and had obviously spent last hours with him in hotel there.

The three are typical of people today in Britain. Everyone's on the move, bidding goodbye, breaking up old associations. The old life is over, the pattern of the new still unknown. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

Again the picnicky, comradely feeling during dinner. Pleasant chatter and laughter. Engineer had been in navy twenty years. Told story of new boys for the navy at Chatham—moved to Folkestone because of bombings. On their first day at Folkestone forty bombers came over.

Letter received from an old friend in America. It shows what the outside world is thinking about us at this critical time:

'I have a feeling you might like to hear all kinds of things you are not likely to have brought to you over the wires for the newspaper.

'For instance, the attitude of the average American man-in-the-street. Men of our type and mentality, so far as I can hear everywhere, are anxious either to get into the war personally with an expeditionary force, or part with large army defence supplies to the Allies immediately.

'I have heard at several different gatherings suggestion that U.S.A. send over half their fighting and bombing planes with pilots *at once*, while they can be some use.

'The newspaper situation here is really something. The true news is bad enough, but imagine going out with an English heart and seeing great black scarelines of fantastic Allied defeats, losses and debacles and looking close, with your heart turning somersaults, and reading an almost invisible "by-line"—Dispatch from Berlin!

'On the other hand, the radio news is so continuous you wonder why anybody ever buys a paper. I enclose the day's programme of news broadcast and commentators. You can sit

in at the war as at a baseball match and get what amounts to a blow-by-blow running commentary.

But the cinema newsreel situation is beyond belief. To go into a cinema for an hour's relaxation to forget your troubles is now impossible. You sit in a plush seat and look at the unbelievable, and become so stunned and sated with horror that nothing any more has power to shock you.

With the usual American business acumen the newsreel specialists are following the conquerors and sending their bloody evidence over on the "Clippers" so that some of the sights and scenes are only four days' old. Yesterday, I saw the sack of Namur.

Another newsreel showed a picture of a beautiful large village in the Ardennes where I was the summer before last—near Spa. The photographer had the inspiration to show the same view in three different acts. (1) British Tommies with motor cycles and sidecars being welcomed with flowers and kisses. (2) The same street in smoking ruins, deserted except for one old man hobbling with a stick. (3) A single file of German tanks wobbling over the stones.

Indication of the unchangeable nature of the British (and they must change if they are to win the war), was another picture of British Tommies riding in trucks to somewhere in France, laughing, and waving their hands, brave, good-natured, boyish, finding it constitutionally difficult to hate strangers and almost impossible to believe in the complete brutality of anybody. How different from the bronze and granite faces of the invaders, and the trained ruthlessness of the Hitler youth.

'Can't you make the English believe in that unnatural ruthlessness before they land on England's shores? You must!

Today I heard the German answer to the King's speech which was so vile and unspeakable (on the radio) that it seems this hate propaganda is as deadly as a gas and as frightening to people easily shaken off their centre.

'Now to something humorous, because there's always something funny somewhere, and this is a true story from a gossip column about a Ritzy social gathering in New York. Prominent society matron says: "I don't know why you're all shaking about America being in danger. Everybody knows Hitler isn't allowed to interfere with neutral countries."'

*Wednesday, 26th June, 1940*

Midlothian bombed last night. Hope mother is all right. The cutting down of staff goes on in the office.

*Thursday, 27th June, 1940*

'Still glorious weather. Raids every night now.' Trying for aircraft works at Bristol. De Gaulle—and the confusion among Frenchmen. Army commanders apparently willing to go on fighting Germans, but reluctant to serve under de Gaulle! Evidently because he was only a colonel a few weeks ago, and was then promoted to his present rank on the field. De Gaulle's broadcast.

Am trying to get into the R.A.F. again, through Sir Archibald Sinclair, Minister for Air.

Diana is ill at school with some throat trouble. Phoned Dartington to find out.

Golf with Keith. Life goes on! Did eight holes in thirty-nine, on a practically deserted course in the evening, but last two holes spoilt by one lone practiser jabbing balls about all over the place.

Air of desolation and dissolution about office now. Everything is breaking up. Very little of the usual life seems to have meaning.

Lunch with Clugman, who goes to R.A.O.C. next Monday.

Am clearing out all my drawers in office.

*Thursday, 4th July, 1940*

Still cutting down on the paper. God, it's depressing.

Bombs at Brighton and Bishopstone. On Monday had my last swim at Brighton before beach closed behind barbed wire, mines, etc. Wonderful sunny day. Picnic on the beach. How stolen and fleeting these delights are now.

French Navy seized or sunk by us today to prevent it being used against us by Germans.

Long talk with Drysdale, back from France. Said French were a different race from last war—all fighting spirit dead. Running away. German soldiers laughing at fleeing civilians, throwing looted cigarettes and chocolate at them.

Drysdale had to destroy stores and guns and food. He was in a boat just behind the *Laicastris*; saw her bombed and sunk.

Good film—revival of the newspaper film *Front Page*—called *His Girl Friday* with Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell.

The lovely weather continues and with it the constant thought—to wake up each morning feeling: 'Well, it hasn't happened yet.' One lives from day to day.

Registered the children for evacuation to Canada or U.S.A. Diana still has temperature—glandular fever. Am going down to Dartington to see her at the week-end.

# 2

*Thursday, 11th July, 1940*

TODAY I received this letter from the  
Prime Minister:

10 Downing Street,  
Whitehall.

July 10, 1940

Dear Mr Drawbell,

Thank you for your letter, from which I note that the article which appeared in your paper on June 30 will be the last you will be publishing of 'The World Crisis' series for the present.

I should like to take this opportunity of complimenting you upon the presentation of these articles, which has been entirely satisfactory to me, and I hope that our newspaper association will be renewed in the near future.

With many thanks for your good wishes,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Accompanying the letter was an autographed copy of the abridged and revised edition of Mr Churchill's book, *The World Crisis*, the book from which we had printed so many articles in the paper.

What a man! In the midst of his many preoccupations and anxieties, when all his waking moments must be concerned with the coming battle for this Island, he finds time to drop a personal letter to me full of courtesy and kindness.

And he graciously remembers our association through his



books and makes this charming gesture. At such a moment! Heaven knows what worries must be on his mind.

[*Note added 10 years later*: On the same day that Mr Churchill wrote to me he was indeed preoccupied with other things. In the second volume of his war memoirs, *Their Finest Hour*, there is this entry under that same date of July 10th, 1940:]

Prime Minister to C.-in-C. Home Forces, C.I.G.S. and General Ismay.

10.VII.40

1. I find it very difficult to visualise the kind of invasion all along the coast by troops carried in small craft, and even in boats. I have not seen any serious evidence of large masses of this class of craft being assembled, and, except in very narrow waters, it would be a most hazardous and even suicidal operation to commit a large army to the accidents of the sea in the teeth of our very numerous armed patrolling forces. The Admiralty have over a thousand armed patrolling vessels, of which two or three hundred are always at sea, the whole being well manned by competent seafaring men. A surprise crossing should be impossible, and in the broader parts of the North Sea the invaders should be an easy prey, as part of their voyage would be made by daylight. Behind these patrolling craft are the flotillas of destroyers, of which forty destroyers are now disposed between the Humber and Portsmouth, the bulk being in the narrowest waters. The greater part of these are at sea every night, and rest in the day. They would therefore probably encounter the enemy vessels in transit during the night, but also could reach any landing-point or points on the front mentioned in two or three hours. They could immediately break up the landing craft, interrupt the landing, and fire upon the landed troops, who, however lightly equipped, would have to have some proportion of ammunition and equipment carried on to the beaches from their boats. The flotillas would however need strong air support from our fighter aircraft during their intervention from dawn onwards. The provision of the air fighter escort for our destroyers after daybreak is essential to their most powerful intervention on the beaches.

2. You should see the Commander-in-Chief's (Home Fleet) reply to the question put to him by the desire of the Cabinet, i.e., what happens if the enemy cover the passage of their invading army with their heavy warships. The answer is that, as far as we know at present, they have no heavy ships not

under long repair, except those at Trondheim,\* which are closely watched by our very largely superior forces. When the *Nelson* and *Barham* are worked up after refit in a few days' time (the 13th and 16th), it would be easily possible to make two forces of British heavy ships, either of which would be sufficiently strong; thus the danger of a northern outbreak could be contained, and at the same time a dart to the south by the Trondheim ships could be rapidly countered.

Moreover, the cruisers in the Thames and Humber are themselves strong enough, with the flotillas, to attack effectively any light cruisers with which the enemy could cover an invasion. I feel therefore that it will be very difficult for the enemy to place large well-equipped bodies of troops on the east coast of England, whether in formed bodies or flung piecemeal on the beaches as they get across. Even greater difficulties would attend expeditions in larger vessels seeking to break out to the northward. It may further be added that at present there are no signs of any assemblies of ships or small craft sufficient to cause anxiety, except perhaps in Baltic ports. Frequent reconnaissance by the air and the constant watching by our submarines should give timely warning, and our minefields are an additional obstruction.

3. Even more unlikely is it that the south coast would be attacked. We know that no great mass of shipping exists in the French ports and that the numbers of small boats there are not great. The Dover barrage is being replenished and extended to the French shore. This measure is of the utmost consequence, and the Admiralty are being asked to press it forward constantly and rapidly. *They do not think that any important vessels, warships or transports, have come through the Straits of Dover.* Therefore I find it difficult to believe that the south coast is in serious danger at the present time. Of course a small raid might be made upon Ireland from Brest. But this also would be dangerous to the raiders while at sea.

4. The main danger is from the Dutch and German harbours, which bear principally upon the coast from Dover to the Wash. As the nights lengthen this danger zone will extend northwards, but then, again, the weather becomes adverse and the 'fishing-boat invasion' far more difficult. Moreover, with cloud the enemy air support may be lacking at the moment of his impact.

\*The *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, which had been torpedoed and were out of action.

5. I hope, therefore, relying on the above reasoning, which should be checked with the Admiralty, that you will be able to bring an ever larger proportion of your formed divisions back from the coast into support or reserve, so that their training may proceed in the highest forms of offensive warfare and counter-attack, and that the coast, as it becomes fortified, will be increasingly confided to troops other than those of the formed divisions, and also to the Home Guard. I am sure you will be in agreement with this view in principle, and the only question open would be the speed of the transformation. Here too I hope we shall be agreed that the utmost speed shall rule.

6. Air-borne attack is not dealt with in this note. It does not alter its conclusions.

*Sunday, 28th July, 1940*

Wonderful broadcast by Dorothy Thompson from America last night:

"The master of the dyke against world chaos is you, Churchill. . . . Around you, Winston Churchill, is a gallant company of ghosts. Elizabeth is there and sweetest Shakespeare, the man who made the English renaissance—the world's renaissance. Drake is there, and Raleigh and Wellington; Burke is there, and Walpole, and Pitt; Byron is there, and Wordsworth and Shelley . . . All the makers of a world of freedom and law are there.

'And when you speak, Churchill, brave men's hearts everywhere go out to you; there are no neutral hearts, except those that have stopped beating have gone into neutral. There are no neutral prayers. Through our hearts and our prayers, we in America, in the United States, say: "God give you strength, God bless you. May you live to cultivate your garden in a free world, liberated from terror and persecution, from war and fear."'

*Saturday, 3rd August, 1940*

Prime Minister warns that the danger of invasion is grave.

*Tuesday, 13th August, 1940*

Am writing this in the train going back to London after week-end in Edinburgh with mother, settling her house and affairs before she goes up to Forfar for six months.

People everywhere are being torn up from their roots, their lives changed, their whole previous scale of values completely upset. This war is at last teaching most of us that possessions at a time like this scarcely count, that merely to be alive is the most we can expect.

In a way we needed this—unfortunately. We have been so long complacent in the face of impending disaster. Good will perhaps come out of this business after all.

Diana is much better. The bungalow at Aller Park is fun. A lovely week-end last week with the children. We bathed at Paignton; had tea at Dellars afterwards. Glorious weather.

Marjorie stayed on at Mill Hill clearing up and getting ready for U.S.A.

Tony Gibbs and his family are off to America.

Air raids have increased in intensity. There are now great daily battles in the air, with four hundred and five hundred German planes coming over at one time.

Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, Portland, Dover—all have got it, but the R.A.F. are putting up a great show, bagging at the ratio of three to one all the time.

All this has led people to move away from the bombed areas, and London, enjoying immunity, is also enjoying an amazing boom. It's impossible to get a table in a restaurant in the evening without standing in a queue for it; the theatres are crowded; cinemas and cafés ditto; the streets thronged with shoppers in the warm sunshine. There's a kind of suppressed, feverish gaiety. The Eve of Waterloo.

What a refuge this country is providing for all nationalities! In Scotland, particularly, this is marked. The streets of Glasgow were full of Polish and Czech soldiers, the officers in their long caps looking like something out of a movie; Dutch sailors, French officers, Australians, Canadians, Maoris from New Zealand—and so on. The whole country is alive with men—and women—in uniform.

Spent a quiet Sunday with Jack Christie on the hills beyond Milngavie.

Have had my interview with R.A.F. selection committee, and will know my fate this week.

Adastral House wasn't a bit the inspiring place it should be. The waiting room was bare, with the yellow-white walls thick with dust. I drew mind pictures on it while I waited and thought how this important place could have been transformed. This room for men waiting to enter the Air Force might have been alive with stirring pictures of air fights painted all round sky-blue walls. We're a strange people at times.

I wasn't good at my interview. I had forgotten the Service mind and foolishly expected the interview to follow the human informal lines of discussion between people in newspaper offices. I should have known better. It was a minor third degree with two uniformed Air Officers (one very silent and the other the Inquisitor), and a civil servant.

Of course it was the right thing for its purpose, as results are now showing, but I am no good with people who have no sense of humour, or in situations where there is no relaxing from a rigid attitude. And when, in reply to a question, 'And what will happen to the *Sunday Chronicle* if you leave?' I said, 'It will probably double its circulation!' there wasn't a smile of understanding at the table.

In this atmosphere I forgot all those qualities in the average journalist that go to the making of a big paper, and became half-reluctant about the whole affair. The Inquisitor's opening attack, 'You are much more useful in your present position than as a junior officer in the R.A.F.', was so reminiscent of all that I had heard before (and of course so true) that I was despondent from the start.

I am afraid my ego had expected more—though heaven only knows why. 'This isn't the war of 1914, you know. Every man in his right job this time!'

*Wednesday, 14th August, 1940*

Big air attacks renewed today. It is quiet and dull in the office. Jim Mollison writes me an outspoken and bitter article

on 'My Pal Lindbergh', dealing with Lindy's pro-Nazi attitude.

'Celina Knox came into the office.

Lunched with Heywood, who says Spain is coming in.

Reports that parachutists have been landing in this country.

Golf at Hendon with Keith in the early evening. These snatched games of golf, usually only nine or ten holes in the early evening after the confusion of the day, have a quality all their own. Our minds are elsewhere but our bodies go through all the old familiar motions.

The fate of the country is being settled at this moment, but we can do nothing about it. We know, though, with an unspoken certainty, that these are the last games we shall play together for a long time.

Played a moderately good ten holes, spoilt by an opening six and seven and a lost ball on a three-hole, bringing another six. In spite of this, did the ten holes in forty-seven. I don't think I shall ever win the Open!

Dinner at Café Royal afterwards and to a film, *Night Train to Munich*, at the Empire, with Rex Harrison and Margaret Lockwood in it.

# 3

*Thursday, 15th August, 1940*

THIS is the day Hitler said he would force Britain to her knees. Not much sign of it so far.

In the Strand a newspaper seller has chalked on his board: 'Today, Aug. 15—and he's only in Madame Tussaud's!'

The air battles continue. Looks as though he were trying to put our airfields near the coast out of action so that he might establish a bridgehead on the coast for invasion.

Lunch with Garry Allighan and a Canadian reporter over here to write about our effort. Listen to more tales of red-tape, official dilly-dallying, and so on.

Jim Mollison came in to tea. He wants to get job ferrying bombers across Atlantic (at £250 a time, it's said) and has approached Beaverbrook.

We talked of flying, journalism, love. I find him a very likeable person, shrewd and intelligent in his own special way. We talk about Bill Courtenay's lecture tour and Jim says that he himself can't make a speech—that he's quite incapable of thinking on his feet.

Evening golf with Keith. Nine holes. Started well, finished poorly. Air-raid alarm as we finished. 'All clear' siren on the way back to town.

Learned later that German planes had got through to Croydon. No knowledge of damage yet.

Went to *Swinging the Gate* revue. Hermione Gingold terrific.

*Friday, 16th August, 1940*

The air attacks continue, become more violent.

Croydon was dive-bombed last night, apparently taken by surprise in the misty light at the end of the day.

The R.A.F. bagged 160 raiders yesterday, all near the coast.

Went today to the Ministry of Information with Reg Simpson of the *Sunday Graphic* to hear the truth about the parachutes found in this country. About eighty had been dropped from planes in various places with their ropes cut to suggest that the wearers had got away. Examination showed ropes had been cut some time before. Packs found with operators' maps and instructions. Just another move in the nerve war.

Raid alarm about lunch-time.

Later went into the basement at the Ministry of Information—their people did a first-rate job of A.R.P. work. The streets gradually cleared of people in the mid-day haze, but taxis and cars and buses continued to function. Girls came in on bikes to M.O.I., reporting for Red Cross duty. A hush of waiting.

Learned afterwards that the raid was on Tilbury and Gravesend. Lunch at Café Royal with Reg and Spencer. Afterwards walked in Green Park with Reg for ten minutes.

Just leaving office when air-raid sirens went about 5.30. Paper was just going away—advance pages to Manchester and Glasgow. A bit chaotic in the basement.

After the 'all-clear' learned that bombers had been over Merton, Surrey, and Croydon—doing slaughter by direct hit on air-raid shelter with women and children in it.

Earlier, Tapsell had come in to tea—straight from Merchant Service. He looked in good fettle—a difference from the pale-faced worrying newspaper man he had been.

*Saturday, 17th August, 1940*

Apparently raiders got Wimbledon last night. Many killed. News of the air raid on London held up by censor for



U.S.A., so that Goebbels got a nine-hour beat in America on the 'destruction' of London.

Lull today. Full moon tomorrow. What then? In six days Germany has lost 492 planes in raids over England.

*Sunday, 18th August, 1940*

Went down to Devon to see the family and have a few days with them.

In the dining car lunched with three girls from the balloon barrage, somewhere up Sheffield way. They had been out the night before—Queens Hotel, Leicester Square—hitting the spots with Canadians and Air Force boys. Their 'binge' mood was still on them; they sat round the table singing and laughing.

*Monday, 19th August, 1940*

Torres. Took Marjorie long walk above Plymouth Road. Bombs in night—Babbacombe and Torquay bombed.

*Tuesday, 20th August, 1940*

Took family to Dartmoor. Cold, windy. Picnic. Thought of theme for war book, but know I shan't write it. Sound of heavy bombs about 6.30.

Letter from mother:

Forfar, Angus.

'Here I am almost settled down in my new house. I hope everything goes well and that there will be no moving about for some time. We have got our house pretty well in order. I think I will like it, but it is of course a big difference from Edinburgh.

I hope you got safely back to London and on time. You missed some excitement. All that evening after you went away the planes were overhead and in the morning about 6 o'clock a balloon broke from its moorings—people thought parachutists were coming!

Spitfires were about over my house zooming and

fighting away, and the noise was very exciting. You would have enjoyed seeing it.

I was reading about the damage near London—hope you keep clear of it.'

*Wednesday, 21st August, 1940*

Newton Abbot station bombed last evening—ten miles away.

*Thursday, 22nd August, 1940*

Lovely day. Swish at Paignton. Nice to be away from it all, but back to London tomorrow. G-r-r-r-r!

*Friday, 23rd August, 1940*

Lazy morning in sun. Making the most of it.

Left Totnes at 4.49 in the afternoon, to get to Paddington at 9.15. Saw damage at Newton Abbot.

Then outside Exeter our train stopped—and stopped—and stopped. Time bombs had been dropped on line ahead. Finally we crawled on to a single track.

In my compartment was a Polish Lieut.-Commander, bent studiously over an English dictionary. We had dinner together, with several double whiskies.

His escape from Warsaw—through Lithuania, Sweden, France to London. His wife and two children left in Lithuania.

In the double-line loop of our single track a down train from London drew up opposite us. Evidently had no dining car; their passengers leaned through windows and bought drinks and food from our train.

Then the one-in-a-million chance: a sailor in our up-train, just home from the Atlantic, leaned out and recognised his soldier brother in down train—an escapee from Dunkirk. Yell of recognition and mutual welcome. Hilarious drinks amid cheers of onlookers. Then the loop train, packed to the corridors, moved slowly away.

Slowly we went on our way towards London. Later ran into air raid. Sky alight with searchlights.

Our train crawled along at fifteen miles per hour, stopping now and again. All lights out.

Lying along our seats in the dark, the Polish officer and I ate chocolate. Finally got to Paddington at 2 o'clock in the morning—five hours late. No taxis. Bed at 3.30.

*Saturday, 24th August, 1940*

Wakened by warning sirens at 8.30 a.m. Now at 1 a.m. on Sunday I am sitting in my hotel in air raid—the third today. The sky is alight with a big fire, it seems in the direction of the City.

I left my office ten minutes ago, having put the paper to press, and came back with Keith. Looks likely that, with this fire to guide them, the German planes will be back again soon on their target.

The second raid warning of the day came at a bad time—four o'clock in the afternoon when we were just getting the first up country edition of the paper ready. Down we went into the basement. The 'all-clear' sounded three-quarters of an hour afterwards, but we were running late all evening in consequence.

We made up a bit of time later, but were still late on the final edition.

Fire engines or ambulances are going past as I write, bells ringing, and in the tenement flats opposite my hotel people are singing *Jenny Dean* and *Oh, Johnny Oh!* The party and 'get together' feeling comes uppermost at these times. Company is comforting.

Ramsgate and Portsmouth bombed heavily today. Big guns shelling also across Channel. Things are mounting to a climax, I feel. I had dinner with Monica at the Savoy Grill. Manetta looked worried about some relations he is trying to get back from unoccupied France through the Spanish Embassy.

R.A.F. claim forty-seven German planes down today.

*Sunday, 25th August, 1940*

Phoned Devon. Marjorie and the children are travelling

up today to see American Consul tomorrow, *re* evacuation of children to U.S.A.

Cable from Napier Moore, Toronto, about arrangements for taking our children—and maintaining them in Canada.

All kinds of arrangements are going on in this way. People of Canada and U.S. are wonderful in their offers.

Tired after last night, I went back to bed and slept till 11.30 a.m.

Lunched alone at Café Royal, but met Keith and Betty afterwards.

Hugh Cudlipp had a typical 'Cuddy' page in the *Pictorial* today on 'Reputations'—those that had gone up and down since the war. Cronin, Duke of Windsor and Noël Coward—down. J. B. Priestley—up.

Sat in park for half an hour.

Met family and saw them off to the country. Don't want them staying night in London.

Dinner with Jim Dawson at the Trocadero. We got caught in alarm at 10.30 on way back. Went into shelter. A.F.S. men and people joking and singing—'There'll always be an England'.

Back to hotel and more raid warnings, but went to bed. Read Norman Lindsay's *The Cautious Amorist*.

*Monday, 26th August, 1940*

Met the children at Madame Tussaud's and had lunch with them. John wanted only ginger-beer and ice-cream, but finally compromised on kidney soup, American corned beef hash and baked beans, strawberry ice! Afterwards we went through the exhibition and the chamber of horrors. How they loved the gory tableaux.

Dinner with Keith and we amused ourselves giving amusing names to the characters in some imaginary never-to-be-written war novel.

Went to the Plaza cinema at 9.30 to see Bop Hope and Paulette Goddard in *The Ghost Breakers*. Just as we went in the sirens wailed again in the inky blackness.

(The black-out has been intensified since Saturday night.)

Film amusing, and a good distraction. It would be a good idea to have films in all air-raid shelters. Left at 11 o'clock before the finish to find that the 'all-clear' had not been sounded.

Groped in the darkness for a taxi. No luck.

Thought of going into an hotel for coffee to pass time. The hotel had locked its doors. A group of people like ourselves very indignant. If any bombs had been dropped in that area people had a right to shelter and the hotel doors should have been open.

Finally Keith got on a bus—packed—and I walked to my hotel. Searchlights probing the cloudy sky, but no sound of planes.

A lovely hot bath—the liftman remarking as he took me up—'You're the only sensible one to go upstairs to bed.' (I hope he's right!); and now, writing this at midnight, the 'all-clear' has not yet been sounded, and a few minutes ago planes, very high, were droning overhead, the searchlights seeking for them in vain.

Silence now. A clock outside is striking twelve.

I turn some amusing things over in my mind, preparatory to sleep. Diana wants me to dedicate the next book I write to her: 'To Diana—who helped me with it!' Sauce!

Phyllis Digby Morton wants me to write an article, 'Women Talk Too Much', for her magazine. This kind of work is an escape.

*Tuesday, 27th August, 1940*

Raid lasted till 4 a.m. I went off to sleep, but wakened by bombs dropping somewhere. No newspapers delivered this morning.

Lunch party with Keith, Keith's father and mother, Webster Evans and his mother, Betty, and a cousin of Keith's—Audrey Brown. Nice Scottish girl from Bathgate.

We talked of Scotland, which freshened me up for a short article Julia Cairns had asked me to write to go with a picture of Scotland for an autumn issue of her magazine. And of the imminence of parting, for everyone is intensely aware of the impermanence of all things today.

Evans is going into the administrative staff of the R.A.F. So too, I hear, is Henry Cotton, the golfer.

• And now I have just written Julia's article in bed at midnight and the planes are droning overhead in the black clouds. I was coming back from dinner about 9.30 when it began.

Funny the way it starts up. Night in London now has a kind of pattern. The streets pitch black, a groping of one's way past shops that loom up suddenly like ships coming at you in a fog. The still night. Silence. And then a faint hum overhead.

A questing searchlight stabs out, lengthens itself across the void like a silver track, is joined by a dozen others. The air suddenly becomes charged with meaning, and suddenly the night with sound. A distant siren wails. A whistle sounds.

Feet behind you start running, the tapping heels of a woman in a hurry to seek shelter. You gaze up. The lights seem concentrated on a spot above your head. Lord, not now, you hope, quickening your step.

And then all the sirens are wailing, and it's as if all hell were lamenting. More whistles, running feet, the sound of the plane is drowned. You reach the hotel door. The sirens have tailed off, a deathly silence has wiped them out of the night, and there is only the hum of a distant engine, the silent searchlights, like dumb, blind men groping with outstretched fingers; and a waiting world.

The 'all-clear' at 12.5—though I can hear planes still. We'll get it later, I expect.

*Wednesday, 28th August, 1940*

Yes, just forty minutes later, when the guests in the hotel had settled in their beds, the sirens went again. The 'all-clear' after an hour or so.

Dora Shackell came into the office very downcast; her young son, Jon, is in America—safe. Why she should feel downcast God only knows. It will be sheer hell waiting the seven or eight days till my little lot get to safety.

Nine o'clock and the warning again. It seems a rather

clever bit of timing by these German bombers to cut the B.B.C. off the air every night so that our people—and sailors on the high seas—will wonder and worry about what is happening. Midnight, and the planes are still circling about over London. Lone ones only and no bombs so far, no gunfire.

These are nuisance raids to keep us awake, tire us out, slow down production.

*Thursday, 29th August, 1940*

That was quite a raid last night. The 'all-clear' did not go until 4 a.m. Seven hours of it. After droning around for hours they finally dropped their stuff—H.E., incendiary, time bombs, screaming bombs, and seemingly everything else. Hundreds dropped in all suburbs—none in central London.

(R.A.F. were over Berlin at the same time.)

Bob sat in shelter for seven hours—after just arriving home at 9 p.m.

Had tea today with the children at Muswell Hill—a bomb dropped not far from them in the night and they went into their shelter. Tonight they start straight off by sleeping in the shelter.

Mysterious notice to newspaper editors from Ministry of Information today—make no mention of plane forced down in the night which is neither bomber nor a fighter.

Home Guard on the watch last night. Apparently the warning was that parachutists were expected.

Dinner with Monica Dickens. She goes to work in a hospital next Saturday.

Did a little work before going to bed. Slept badly, expecting the usual. One practically sleeps with one eye open nowadays. No sirens, but sound of bombs in early morning.

# 4

*Friday, 30th August, 1940*

A BRILLIANT morning. Deep blue sky, warm sun, and the silver balloons already on guard. Looks like a perfect day, with a heat haze later, for the bombers.

Marjorie and children going back this morning to Dartington, their business at American Embassy done.

Had hair cut on the way to office, and first warning went.

Bus conductor told me that the night before he should have got to his garage to end his day's work at 9 p.m. Instead he got there at 6.10 in the morning. When I asked him about pay or overtime, he answered: 'Well, you can't really expect it, can you? The company isn't earning it.'

As I went in past the Home Guard at the office entrance, learned that bombers a few minutes before had been at Kingston—evidently they were after Hawkers' aircraft factory.

Lunch at the Aldwych Club. And afterwards back in the office, another warning and all down to the basement for about twenty minutes just after lunch.

Then the third, about 4.45. All down again to basement. If this goes on obviously a great deal of time and production is going to be lost. Something will have to be devised to stop this going-to-cover. Most people hate it anyway.

Dinner alone and then an hour at the Windmill Theatre. The Tired Business Man stuff. An observer in the R.A.F., on his own too, sat down beside me, and in the interval we



had a few drinks together. Posted to the north for a special bombing course, his train was two hours late, so he decided to stay night in London.

Air-raid warning from stage. No one moved. Show, of course, went on.

I walked home afterwards—my nightly fate—under the searchlights and the deep droning of planes.

Eleven p.m. now, it is still on. Looks like a difficult Saturday for us producing the paper.

*Saturday, 31st August, 1940*

—just getting on for midnight—and there goes the first bomb of this sixth or seventh (it's too much now to remember which) raid today.

Last night's ended at 4 a.m. and the first today began only a few hours afterwards at 8.30 in brilliant sunshine and the same unchanging blue sky.

I had breakfast and got in to office by 10 o'clock. As soon as I was in, off went the alarms. The staff arrived late, but I had got down to a good start—with spare blocks made overnight and early morning. We are learning not to get caught out and to have lots of things by us for emergencies. Then another warning about one o'clock, and again everybody in the basement.

Keith got engaged to Betty today and we had drinks and printed their photographs in the paper.

Great air battles in the afternoon; you could hear the planes high above London. Croydon bombed; women shoppers machine-gunned; fighting over Ilford; pilots baling out.

We just got the first edition away when another alarm was sounded. Then a brief one at 10 o'clock tonight with the third edition going away, I left just after 11, and now we are in the middle of another.

The R.A.F. bombed Berlin in the night, pilots going down to two hundred or three hundred feet and dropping fifteen tons of bombs.

The whole thing is unreal and unbelievable. To see the

newspaper under production in the basement, everything functioning normally, and to know that the war is practically being decided overhead is a remarkable experience. The reality of the detail of the job; the unreality of the setting and the background. It's as though we were all living on another planet.

New Yorkers, three thousand miles away, reading of these air duels and raids are no doubt horrified—as we were when we read of Spain and Finland and Poland. It's always the unknown that is fearsome. To live through them has become a part of the daily routine.

*Sunday, 1st September, 1940*

Another brilliant day, warm, blazing sun, cloudless sky. What a summer it has been! What a time we would have had any other year but this.

We used to go up to North Berwick for a whole month's golf and swimming. About five or six families, all with children, used to occupy the same houses in the Quadrant for the month, year after year. All the children played together.

A letter from Mrs Scott tells us of a day visit to North Berwick. Only the Spences are in the Quadrant. The beach is deserted.

Down to Totnes to rejoin family—the trains packed and sticky. People standing in corridors. Every train crowded these days. The whole population appears to be on the move. Got down only half an hour late.

*Monday, 2nd September, 1940*

What weather—never a break. Took John and Diana in the afternoon to Paignton; bathed. Tea at Dellars (hot chocolate, buttered toast, and ice-cream!). And then lots of fun at the indoor game place—three times on the electric motors, banging into each other. John loved it, but felt slightly sick afterwards. I'm not surprised.

If this weather lasts will take a day or two off. Seems no likelihood of any other holiday for a long time.

*Tuesday, 3rd September, 1940*

A year of war, and the same weather as just a year ago,  
But what a change in the situation!

How different it all might have been had we realised that we were at war and prepared and planned accordingly from the first day of war. There would have been no Dunkirk and retreat from France, and we might have been giving the Germans all last winter the medicine they now give us daily and nightly.

The air war seems now definitely to depend on how many fighters we have to keep the raiders off till the weather changes. R.A.F. are doing magnificently, but losses are becoming heavy.

U.S. has released fifty destroyers to us in return for eight naval bases.

Morning swim at Paignton. Lunch with Marjorie, Diana and John. Back to Aller Park by two o'clock. Blazing hot in the garden in the afternoon. Sat dozing in deck-chair.

*Wednesday, 4th September, 1940*

Wonderful morning. Up at 7 o'clock to catch 8.20 train back to London.

At Newton Abbot went across to hotel for coffee and bacon and eggs. Talked with bookstall attendant about the bombing of Newton Abbot. Three German planes came out of the clouds, chased by Spitfires. They dived at the station, let rip. Tried for the bridge across lines—caught a row of cottages. Mess! The London train was late, or it would have been in the platform. The Crewe train had just gone out.

Air-raid warning just as our train drawing into London.

Letter from the Air Ministry (Press Section) asking if I still want to be Press Officer in the R.A.F.—they've caught up with my first application of September, 1939. Am going to see Cecil Lewis at Ministry tomorrow anyway.

Nine-fifteen in the evening and the sirens have just gone again.

*Thursday, 5th September, 1940*

Went to see Cecil Lewis—nice, crisp, friendly type. He is a Squadron-Leader with wings and M.C. from the last war. He is the Cecil Lewis who wrote *Sagittarius Rising*—a lovely book. Works in the usual kind of dingy Whitehall room with Dodds—who used to be on the *Express*.

Lewis explained that they needed more Press Officers; rank would be Pilot Officer to start, going length of Flight-Lieutenant. Said the early R.A.F. opposition to the Press and publicity had gone with the outbreak of real war. They *wanted* their deeds to be known now. Outlined duties. Bomber or fighter station. Made an appointment for me with Air-Commodore Peake.

More air raids. Worked through lunch to get the paper advanced in case of further raids—which certainly seem likely. Hitler threatening all-out attacks. War certainly seems to be reaching a critical phase.

Got caught in longest raid—9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Just after the 'all-clear' at 5 o'clock there was another warning. At breakfast saw air battle over North London in the bright blue sky.

*Friday, 6th September, 1940*

Looked in at my hairdresser on way to office for shave and shampoo from Frank Seward. Yesterday was his day off, but as an A.R.P. warden he spent most of his time on duty—all night to 5 a.m.

In his district two houses were destroyed by H.E., three others burnt down by incendiaries; eight people sent off to hospital; a woman gave birth to a baby in a shelter; and going home in the morning, tired out, he was able to give a woman (peeping frightenedly through a front door) a drop of milk from his Thermos flask to make herself a cup of tea.

'We had everything last night', he laughs.

And at 8 a.m., without sleep, back on his job as hairdresser! How long can a man take this kind of thing?

Raid warning at lunch time—sandwich at my desk.

Another snatched game of golf—nine holes—at Hendon.

As we arrived in the evening, a squadron of twelve Spitfires took off from the nearby airfield and zoomed into the sky.

Ten minutes later came the sirens, and as we finished our nine holes we heard the sound of the returning planes. Home they came in perfect formation—one, two, three, four. . . . Yes, all twelve of them! Hurrah!

This strange life. Millions of young, eager men like Keith waiting interminably to be called to do something. Playing golf while the battles go on overhead.

Dinner with Monica Dickens, back from hospital for an evening in town.

Warning at 9 p.m. Writing this at ten o'clock.

# 5

*Saturday, 7th September, 1940*

WRITING this at 2 o'clock on Sunday morning. Have just walked back from office to my hotel with Keith. It's a night in which all Thames-side London seems to be in flames. Overhead, high above the searchlights, the bombers drone.

The streets are alight from the reflected flames of the great fires. As we walked bombs fell ahead of us; we crouched down instinctively as they whistled through the air. Seemed very heavy stuff.

This is Hitler's 'revenge' raid with a bang. This is the thing that could always have happened. It has happened now. This is certainly the new warfare.

It began about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, after a sunny day of ominous lull and quiet. Suddenly the thud, thud of guns. We dashed to the office windows. Away up in the blue the tiny shapes of planes surrounded by anti-aircraft fire.

Bombs dropped and soon a great pall of smoke shot up from the direction of the river.

It was rush time in the office, with the first edition pressure on, and what struck me most was the unreality of the whole thing. A compositor would set up his 'take' of copy and go to the open window to watch the raid; a sub-editor would 'sub' a piece of copy and rush to the window in the same way; reporters were turning in their stories and slipping up to the roof to get a ringside seat.

It was the first time the Luftwaffe had got through to the centre of London in daylight, and in force. We had been

waiting for this; now it was happening; and we couldn't believe it. There was very little flak, and the Luftwaffe seemed to be doing what it liked. The clouds of smoke grew and grew over the Thames-side.

We went up on to the roof, where the spotters were, and watched the fighting and the fires.

About 7.30 I slipped out for a quick meal, and by 8.30 the next raid was on.

Guided by the flames, the bombers went straight for their targets, spreading the fires all along the docks. Soon the sky was alight with fires and the flashes of gunfire.

Up on the roof it was a fantastic experience. There it was—one side of London in flames, the buildings in the middle distance silhouetted against the inferno. Bombs kept dropping into the flames. Far away in the sky the flashes of gunfire could be seen without the sound of the guns being heard.

One of our girl reporters, returned from the east end, herself shaken from the experience, described the plight of the refugees wading through knee-deep glass, clutching little belongings, caught on the bridges across the river by fire engines rushing to the scene.

The general mess and confusion with the menacing planes overhead dropping their stuff all the time. No water to be got—low tide, burst mains. Police, anxious about possible oil explosions, desperately trying to get people out of the area.

The sky from the roof was reminiscent of the distant front line of the last war, but one missed the shelling—the growling of guns and the crumps of explosions near one. And it was odd to feel not the old fear, but a certain detached disbelief that this was London, this was the biggest air raid of the war, and that it was all happening to us.

The planes are overhead again as I write.

As we walked home from the office in the early morning, meeting odd pairs and threes of people, apparently completely unperturbed, coming across groups of men in doorways watching the show and discussing it, it was like walking through a dream.

Had a hot bath with the bombs still falling. What a day and night.

*Sunday, 8th September, 1940*

The raid lasted till 5 a.m.—the worst air raid (so far) in this war. Between three hundred and four hundred dead and fourteen hundred seriously injured. At Paddington station this morning—going down to Totnes—the station was overflowing with women and children—many of them straight from the bombed areas—hair untidy, faces pale, eyes bleary with suffering and lack of sleep, carrying pillows, blankets, a suitcase with a few things thrown in (many even without that). Heard that Paddington had just been missed by a bomb.

On my train (packed to the corridors like all other trains pulling out from London this morning) met Sybil Ottaway going to join the W.A.A.F., and a family of three children getting away to the west country with a nanny. (Their parents left in London.)

Nice to hear the unconcerned chatter of the children, one of whom insisted that the Air Minister should 'be able to fly a plane, and wondered whether Mr Churchill (having been First Lord) could swim in the sea as befitted his office.

Also met Margie Weldon in the diner, going down to Cornwood in Devon to see her daughter Wendy. Her brothers in the R.A.F. are having a busy time.

There was not much talk in the train. Most people were too tired. But there was certainly anger among the people who did open their mouths to let out their feelings.

*Monday, 9th September, 1940*

London got it again all last night—ten hours of indiscriminate bombing in the east and west end and central areas. Casualties expected to be 'not so heavy' as Saturday's raid, although apparently there was more gunfire noise.

Down here away from it all, took John and Diana to Paignton for a lovely swim in a deserted sea from a deserted beach. Then we had hot chocolate and hot buttered toast at Dellars, an ice-cream wafer outside and two turns in the bumper cars, during which we banged into each other with great gusto.

No eggs to be got for Marjorie who asked me to bring some



home if obtainable. Peaceful here in Devon. It will be like going back to the front tomorrow or Wednesday when I return to London.

*Tuesday, 10th September, 1940*

London got another terror raid for nine hours last night.

Took Sheila, John and Diana to Paignton. No bathing. The beach is now wired. The high tides are coming and Hitler's best chance of invasion is now. The happy routine: tea at Dellars and bumper cars afterwards.

Went to Newton Abbot for dinner—oxtail soup, roast chicken, banana and cream—and very nice too. Got home at 8.30 just as darkness came down. London air-raid warning at 8.30 tonight.

*Wednesday, 11th September, 1940*

Up to London early in morning. The old place has taken a whack. Madame Tussaud's cinema gone, most of the stations out of action, big flats and dwellings just disappeared overnight. Delayed-action bombs were dropped all over the place and many streets were roped off, etc.

Pushed the work in the office to be ready for evening. One of our sports sub-editors killed. Churchill on radio at 6 o'clock, warning nation about danger of invasion:

'The effort of the Germans to secure daylight mastery of the air over England is the crux of the whole war . . . all his preparations for invasion are speedily going forward.

'If the invasion is going to be tried at all, it does not seem that it can be long delayed. The weather may break at any time . . .

' . . . we must regard the next week or so as a very important period in our history.'

Big air raid all night and—welcome change—intense anti-aircraft barrage. Streets at dusk are now deserted. People make straight for shelters.

I stayed 'put' in my room on fourth floor of hotel, but it is foolish, perhaps, considering the stuff dropping round. In the

early morning heard whistle and shriek. Waited for the crash, but it was a 'time' bomb. Discovered in morning it was 150 yards away at Tottenham Court Road Underground.

*Thursday, 12th September, 1940*

Everybody glad about anti-aircraft barrage last night. It's heartening to hear us hitting back.

Drew some extra money from bank to have by me in case of invasion and confusion.

Packed a small manuscript case in my desk with a few essentials in case I have to make a hurried get-away and go underground. The Gestapo will have our newspaper's records all right and we shall certainly be 'for it'.

[Note written later: Five years later, on the 13th September, 1945, the world was given the official news that Himmler's Gestapo prepared for the invasion of England in 1940 by compiling a list of persons whose arrest was to be 'automatic' after the Wehrmacht's victory. The list was among Nazi secret documents seized at the end of the war, and named 35 publications, 'the offices of which were to be seized immediately, records confiscated and executives arrested'. My newspaper was on the list.

Eighteen years later, in 1958, a book *Operation 'Sea-Lion'*, by Ronald Wheatley, based on official sources, described the 'reign of terror' which was to be set up following the arrests of people on the Nazi Black List.]

Put into my briefcase a .25 automatic revolver and twenty-five cartridges. The other contents were an odd mixture sent out for on the spur of the moment and bought by an office-boy. I had never prepared for this moment.

The whole contents of the case were:

- 1 .25 automatic revolver: 25 cartridges
- 1 cloth cap
- 3 handkerchiefs
- 1 Angora scarf
- 1 pair woollen socks, with mending wool
- 1 shirt with collar attached
- 1 pair of 'Jockey' underpants

- 1 silk undervest
- 2 slabs Rowntree's 'Plain York' chocolate
- 1 cut-throat razor
- Several sheets of Jeyes' toilet paper
- 1 small writing-pad with stamped envelopes
- 1 small electric torch
- 2 No. 8 batteries
- 1 small flask of whisky
- 1 length of strong string
- 1 tin of 'Elastoplast' first-aid dressing
- 1 new tooth-brush
- 1 tube of tooth-paste
- 1 tube of Veganin tablets
- 1 packet Craven A cigarettes wrapped in cellophane paper
- 1 box of matches
- 1 reel of white linen thread and 1 reel of black linen thread
- 1 roller bandage
- 1 small bottle tincture of iodine
- 1 folding road map of Great Britain
- 1 card of safety-pins
- 1 packet of needles
- 1 pair of scissors
- 1 tube of shaving-cream
- 1 small compass
- 2 pencils
- 1 comb
- £50--in ten-shilling notes

Just a few things to see me over the first days if I have to 'disappear'.

More than once in the past ten years I have been advised to 'watch my step' in the line I have taken about the Nazis.

We have known in the office for a long time that a Gestapo Black List was being compiled and that we were on it.

Hitler's grudge against us did not begin with the war.

For many years before 1939 we published articles by our team of writers who saw that Hitler was after world conquest, and who were not afraid to say so.

I have heard people say that if only Britain had been warned of Germany's preparations for war, Hitler might have been stopped before he could have started. The truth is that the warnings were loud and clear for those who cared to heed them.

It was as long ago as 1930—three years before Hitler came

to power—that a prophetic message from Berlin, was published in this country. The writer was J. L. Mellor; a member of my staff.

Mellor went to Germany for me at a time when little was known in Britain about the Nazis and their aims. I had just spent a week in Germany and had seen enough to make me realise that the situation was worth close investigation. I had heard considerable talk about Brownshirts, but there had been little sign of their activities. I asked Mellor to go and see what they were really doing. He saw—and told.

Call it sensational if you like. Mellor mixed with the Brownshirts, met their leaders, heard what they had to say, and wrote this:

Berlin,  
September 28, 1930.

‘Beware of Adolf Hitler.

‘That is the message I would give to the people of Britain after a thorough investigation into the real aims and character of the would-be dictator of Germany. For his own purposes, Hitler is now trying to delude the public into the belief that he intends to work only through constitutional means.

‘I have been in close contact with the heads of the Nationalist Socialist Party, and from what I have learned here and in Munich I can reveal that there are difficult times ahead for Britain if the reins of power in Germany are placed in the hands of Hitler—a happening which daily becomes more likely.

‘Hitler is the greatest political force in Germany, backed up by the youth of that country and with potentialities of power behind him which are only just beginning to be appreciated. Hitler may turn out to be the saviour of his country; he may place Germany in the very forefront of the nations; but at the moment he is like a newly-invented explosive of uncomprehended power.

‘He may be the man who will wreck Europe and plunge the world into confusion. We have seen a curious example of his political methods during the Supreme Court trial at Leipzig of the three officers accused of propaganda work on behalf of his party.

‘In the evidence he gave he attempted to prove that his

party stands on a legal basis, and that he would always endeavour to attain his ends by constitutional means.

'But this form of propaganda does not deceive the well-informed. Hitler's clear intention is to secure for himself and his party the status he lacks.

'Similarly, Hitler is handing out soothing syrup to foreign nations. He has made an astute move in utilising acquiescent newspapers to broadcast milk-and-water versions of his aims and plans.

'Long quotations from foreign newspapers favourable to Hitler have appeared in journals in Berlin and Munich, and they all help to consolidate his position.

'Hitler may have no great antipathy to Britain. In Britain he has been hailed as Britain's friend, but the fact is that the basic thing in Hitler's creed is "Germany first", and, since he is fanatical and ruthless and backed by millions of determined people who demand quick action "and to hell with the consequences", he is a real menace to the British Empire and to world peace.

'His particular brand of Fascism caught the imagination of the young people of Germany, and now to them Hitler is an idol. In Munich and Berlin I have talked with dozens of representative types of German students, and they are all for Hitler and all against the "old gang" of politicians.

' "Hitler will stop at nothing to bring about the new Germany", one of his closest associates told me, "and we love him for it. He is our greatest bulwark against Bolshevism. He will get back our colonies and build up our Empire. He is our champion against the nations who would bleed Germany white. He will fight these nations to the bitter end."

' "And do you include France, America, and Britain among these nations?" I asked.

' "We do", was the definite reply. "There are six or seven million of us. Hitler will stand no nonsense, and we are all with him. It is a challenge to the world."

' "This is a fair representation of the general view of the Hitler party. It is of profound significance to Britain."

Lunched with Anna Wibberley at the Ivy. Spoke to Val Gielgud.

Anna as usual full of ideas. No wonder she turns out

such a good magazine. Lying awake during raid, hearing lone bomber drone over her head before dropping bomb, she got idea for short story. Wants me to write it for her.

That's the good editor—finding material out of every personal experience.

No tea in office owing to low gas pressure. Everyone out of office by 5.30 in order to be home for food and to change into shelter kit before the evening's raid.

This is now the common programme. Get home quickly, have some food, change into old slacks, pullover, have small haversack with refreshments, etc., lying ready to hand, and you are prepared for anything to come. It usually comes.

Dinner between 7 and 8 o'clock with Keith at Trocadero (Café Royal closed owing to delayed action bomb). Champagne cocktail, smoked salmon, curry of mutton, ice cream. How long can this go on?

We laugh over an American correspondent's exaggerated story of London in the raids, quoted in the *Evening Standard*.

Back in dusk to my hotel. The usual feeling of impending doom all around one in the darkened, empty streets. London waits, hidden, for that first unearthly moaning of the sirens. The thoughts of people fuse in this common experience. It is a bond.

Raid commenced with a rip at 9.25. There go the guns banging away like hell—nice sound—and the planes groaning overhead. What a bloody sound that is!

Took hot bath in the middle of it—like a fool. Writing this sitting up in bed. Wiser people have gone downstairs.

*Friday, 13th September, 1940*

Slept not too badly. The 'all-clear' at 5.50 a.m. Another air raid warning at 7.40 a.m.

To office early. No morning papers delivered—always a bad sign. Another alarm at 9.45 a.m.—lasting four hours. Lone raiders get Metropole Hotel, Buckingham Palace; bombs in Whitehall and Downing Street.

Invasion signs mount up. Date appears to be Monday.

Worked all day in the basement trying to get advance

feature pages away to our Manchester and Glasgow offices. Did advance pages of 3, 5, 12, leaving the front page only for tomorrow.

Mrs Sones is back in office, looking ill and unhappy after her grievous loss. Hope this work and activity will buck her up.

Amazing how unperturbed everybody is, or appears to be—even the very little office-boys. Death and destruction all around, but they are just as usual. In fact, better than usual. I think it's this knowledge that we are all in it together that stimulates everybody and makes for a terrific family feeling. The people of this country are very much together now.

Jim Mellor came in. He is back from defending ships with his gun, and is to report again to his own army unit. No travel facilities available—dislocation of traffic. There he is, on his own in London, with a Bren gun and four thousand rounds of ammunition parked at Euston Station!

Lunch with Harry Heywood at Aldwych Club, deserted save for many R.A.F. administrative officers from Air Ministry, who are given run of club and practically keep it going.

In the afternoon a lone raider swoops out of low clouds—before warning announced—and whiz goes heavy bomb over our heads and lands with terrific din, smoke and blaze beyond us. Learn later it hit big block of offices in Euston Road, killing fifty.

Another bomb on big department store in Oxford Street. Earlier, a school was hit, killing two hundred.

To hotel just before black-out at 8.15.

Tried to phone family at Totnes. Told that all long-distance calls are now cancelled. Government priority only. Is this it?

Had hot bath at 9 o'clock. The warning has not gone yet. Depressed by sight of queues of people standing waiting at 7 o'clock for shelters to open. Babies in mothers' arms. Surely we could manage things better than this.

After Saturday's raid on east end, I am told, five hundred people were herded in school (still in east end) to wait for buses to take them away. On Sunday the buses still had not

come and nothing had been done to get these wretched people away from the scene of their shock and terror. Although great blocks of flats and luxury hotels in west end are deserted, no one seems to have thought of using them, both for a humanitarian and propaganda purpose. On Monday the school was bombed. Many killed."

Spoke too soon—the sirens have just wailed; the klaxon horn is blaring out in the hotel corridor. Am going to read Jimmy Agate's *Ego* 4.



# 6

*Saturday, 14th September, 1940*

A HOT night of noise. Slept fitfully. Got into office early to get good start on paper. First warning at 9.46 a.m. Day of warnings and 'all clears' soon afterwards.

Late in evening told that raiders were really parachute carriers and that parachutists had been dropped North of London. Trying to confirm. Slipped out between early editions to the Strand for bite of food.

Raid alarm as I walked back to office at 8 o'clock. How rapidly the streets cleared. Another warning later in office. For the first night for a week no gunfire or bombs at usual time.

Now at midnight I have come back to hotel and the night is strangely silent. Like the silence in the last war before the barrage opened up. Is it coming with the dawn?

When Buckingham Palace was bombed, Herbert Seaman went down to do the story. Discovered that their Majesties' shelter was on the street level, usual type.

I collected from the scores of pictures coming in to the office a dozen or so photographs of the damage to London. For the record only—for future memories. Incredible that this is London.

How quiet the night is.

*Sunday, 15th September, 1940*

Another raid during the night while we put the final edition away. Lovely sunny morning.

Went down to Devon from Paddington, the train crowded. Luckily Margie Weldon going down too—her job at the Admiralty misfired—and we had lunch together on train while she told me about her life on Malta.

Sheila waiting with car at Newton Abbot. Nice to get back to country again. But a curious reaction of tiredness sets in as soon as one is safely away from London.

Sorted out Diana's and John's stamps. This is the real life.

London bombed again today in spectacular raids, the R.A.F. bringing down 178 enemy planes.

Peaceful here in Devon. And odd, when one hears the news of London on the air, one feels out of it.

*Monday, 16th September, 1940*

Took the family to Torquay to buy things for their new school at Wincanton. Wonderful sense of relief that they are not being evacuated to America. Hope we have made the right decision. Watched R.A.F. cadets training. Nice lunch, hot day, no sign of war—except barbed wire and empty beaches.

*Tuesday, 17th September, 1940*

Made this John's birthday (instead of September 21st) seeing he and Diana are off to school Thursday. To Paignton for tea, and then *five times* on the bumper cars. Diana a bit peeved at first because her car stuck a little, but pretty good fun.

This certainly is a break from London, but return there tomorrow.

*Wednesday, 18th September, 1940*

Up at 7 a.m. for 8.20 train to London. Lovely morning. Sheila took me in car to the station. Sad to leave the children, who are off to school in Somersct on Thursday.

Marjorie and Sheila are going home on Saturday to Mill

Hill. Hope the invasion doesn't catch us out up there, right on Newhaven and certainly in the right area if anything happens.

Lunch in restaurant car with army major off to Gibraltar tomorrow. Good type, keen, pale-blue eyes, been ten years in army.

Talked about the tommy-guns for close fighting. 'They certainly blast a hole in anything.' And about the new army's taboo (in pre-war days) on anything to do with the old trench warfare of the last war. 'The idea was apparently to cut out all the old trench warfare without giving us the equipment to fight the new mechanised one!'

London has taken a knocking. Bourne and Hollingsworth, D. H. Evans, John Lewis's, have all caught it. Bombs in Piccadilly, Park Lane, Berkeley Square, Portland Place—all the landmarks.

Bob Paterson spent the week-end at Welwyn to get out of town. George Collier got hell near Biggin Hill aerodrome. Barry is sleeping in the office at nights. Herbert Scaman says he can do his bit of writing from Norwich. How right he is.

Pushed paper on in this now accepted style of being ready for anything.

In the evening wrote short story for Anna Wibberley's magazine. One has to assume always that life goes on.

The story is called *The Night They Met*. It deals with an English girl lying in the darkness listening to the drone of a German raider. The lonely type, she goes back in her mind to the few men in her life, wondering why she has missed the big things—love, marriage, motherhood. Then it switches to the German pilot in the plane. He is remembering his childhood and his English nurse. He would like to have met an English girl . . . etc., etc. . . . Sighs as he gives the sign for the 'bombs away', and gives a momentary thought to the crashing roar they will make. . . .

Raid warning at 8 o'clock.

Now at ten o'clock it's still going on merrily. But it has given me the right atmosphere for my story, and my typewriter helps to blot out the noise. Nothing like concentration!

Something heavy dropped not far away. Now for bed.

*Thursday, 19th September, 1940*

The heavy thud was a bomb in the forecourt of the British Museum fifty yards away, and as nothing got nearer than that I stuck it out in my own bed.

'All clear' at 5.40 a.m. A lot of stuff dropped. Land mines—of all things. Not much damage at the museum, but all the windows opposite wrecked.

St Pancras got it too, and Peter Robinson's, and Woolworths at Holborn, and the Wallace Collection, I hear, and the Office of Records, and lots more. Hundreds of girls arriving to work at Peter Robinson's hanging about Oxford Street—lost.

Takes a bit of handling, this sort of thing, and it must be making for a lot of dislocation and confusion and suffering. Lots of traffic blocks and diversions on way to my office.

Given a lift in taxi by Ulric Walmsley, who has just had three golden weeks holidaying at Torquay, and he's not yet quite used to the tempo of our new London nights. It's a life of contrasts.

Am writing this at 8 p.m. and there go the warnings. A few minutes ago I was having a quick snack in a restaurant, and the evening mood was settling down. The streets rapidly emptying, no traffic, people hurrying with babies to the shelters. How this evening atmosphere now pervades our lives. Be ready, it's coming. And it comes.

Lunched at Aldwych Club with Reg Simpson and Heywood, and had drinks with George Wilde and Walmsley.

A good story about the A.R.P. warden who saw a slit of light in the window of a block of luxury flats. He called down the owner, a very smart number in a dressing gown. 'Madam', he said, 'you've got a chink up there.' She replied hotly: 'You're a liar, it's a Japanese friend.'

(There starts the barrage of anti-aircraft guns.)

Another lunch story—a nice silly story with nothing to do with the war. A firm of brewers held a competition inviting the public to submit the best name for their beer for an advertising campaign. There were thousands of entries, of course, but one very curious one stuck in the minds of the organisers and judges. Someone had suggested that their

beer should be called 'Murder in a Boat'.

They were so puzzled that they invited the competitor to visit them and explain what the name had to do with their beer. 'It's very striking, of course', they said, 'but what on earth has "Murder in a Boat" to do with our beer? We just don't get it.'

'Oh, it's easy', was the reply. 'It's bloody near water!'

Went after lunch to Air Ministry to see Air Commodore Peake. While waiting for him Cecil Lewis introduced me to Bob Low, a very live-wire U.S. correspondent, just off to join our navy to cover the invasion story—when it comes—for the American magazine *Liberty*.

Peake is a very nice chap. Tall, fair, pale-blue eyes, nice sense of humour. I liked him at once.

He explained that they wanted six public relations officers attached to Groups, to attend to 'distinguished' visitors to R.A.F., to film, to broadcast, to send in big stories, to go on missions with the R.A.F., and generally to tell the R.A.F. story to the world.

At the beginning of the war these press officers got rank of Squadron-Leader and naturally this aroused resentment among Flying Officers who had taken up flying as career, and after years of it were perhaps Flight-Lieutenants or Wing-Commanders.

The new idea is to attract a more experienced type of man for the expanding R.A.F., and Peake says he likes me. I'm the type he wants. But, he mentions a little diffidently, 'it's a bit different from editing a newspaper. I mean, you'll have to start as a Pilot Officer.' I say that's fine by me; let's get going.

People are taking this bashing of London, and the dislocation and confusion of ordinary life, amazingly well. The personal discomfort, loss and suffering, the hardship and inconvenience, are pretty severe.

Two or three thousand have been killed and five or six thousand wounded. But people are remarkably stoical about it and go their way with their own private thoughts about it all. There is more hate now about Germany (I'm trying to

get Jimmy Hodson to write an article for us, 'We are Learning to Hate') than there ever was in the last war.

But they would like a break from this bombing. Or they would like to know that Germany is getting it hot. And when the R.A.F. have smashed the invasion barges and invasion concentrations I have a feeling that Germany *will* get it hot. But that's their first job.

*Friday, 20th September, 1940*

It was a noisy night, the planes seeming to fly much lower. According to the *Evening Standard* air correspondent, that was because they were flying faster, bombing by the clock above the clouds, and the dense clouds threw down the sound.

Got to sleep early, but woke about 1 a.m.—not by bombs—but by shoes being banged down just outside my door!

Got off to sleep again, but heard the 'all clear' at 5.30 a.m. Slept heavily afterwards.

Lunched with Nancy Pearn at the Café Royal. She has had a time bomb outside her office, but when it exploded it was the building opposite that got the worst of it. Only Pearnie's windows were smashed.

She has the use now of George Newnes's office for daylight raids. Her staff just get up and take the work along the street to Newnes where they have their own corner in the basement. Within five minutes of a warning they are settled down to work in their Newnes quarters. She tells me that Mary Allen's house in Wimbledon has been destroyed.

I had arranged to have tea with Monica Dickens in Regent Street, but the street is closed by bombs, and so we go to Fullers in the Strand.

She is absolutely immersed in her hospital work and full of admiration for most of the nurses. But some of them have odd ideas and appear to be concerned only with their own dignity and position and very little with the patients' welfare. There are a number of actual and potential lesbians, she says, one girl, intelligent and attractive, being the leader.

She got into another girl's bed under the pretext of being

afraid of bombs and was highly indignant when her advances were repulsed. 'After leading me on, too!' she protested.

She is intensely jealous when Monica mentions her own fiancé, and retaliates by boasting that a nurse tried to commit suicide for love of her! They sound a nice jolly crowd of healthy young women!

This particular girl jokes about lesbianism all the time, treats it as nothing, and tries to 'jolly' the girls into experimenting.

Monica says the food is poor, and the patients are pretty awful. They make dirty jokes all the time, especially when bed-panning. One woman's husband, 'visiting, tried to get into bed beside his wife. In the crowded ward a nurse had to haul him off.

I suggest later that she ought to write a book about it all to follow her other, *One Pair of Hands*, and call it *One Pair of Feet*. But I can see at once that the idea has already occurred to her.

Lovely evening; played seven holes and taxied back, giving soldier a lift to Hendon cinema.

Hendon got it last night, he tells me; several houses destroyed. He lifted a dead girl of twelve out of the debris of one house.

Had a quick bath and got down to hotel dining room at 7.55, just as sirens went. It's getting earlier every night.

Head waiter told me how, after his work at night, he runs to Leicester Square through the bombing to get the Underground to his home.

Someone comes in and says two big bombs already dropped—Piccadilly way.

I go out into the street for a few minutes after my dinner. So this is London at nine o'clock on a September evening. Dead, utterly deserted, intensely black except for the almost human traffic lights, changing their colours silently for traffic that no longer exists. Their green is ghostly, and creepily cold. No people about, except a man and a woman somewhere there in the dark, talking together in French, their feet rattling loudly on the streets as they hurry for shelter.

The planes overhead now. The guns silent. A swish of a bomb—no detonation. Evidently a 'time' bomb—or a dud.

The lift man tells me he looked into a shelter last night. 'I'll wager there wasn't an Englishman there', he says, prejudiced, I feel, 'all foreigners who ought to be ashamed of themselves.'

My bank clerk, doing A.R.P. work, ran into a land mine last night.

'We heard it swish gently down. Saw the parachute. Thought it was a man. Then saw the great big horns sticking out of it. God, it gave me a turn.' But afterwards he adds: 'You know, I think all this is doing us all a lot of good.'

Now for bed and the *New Statesman* and the *Spectator*.



# 7

*Saturday, 21st September, 1940*

STORY of the sinking of *City of Benares* on way to U.S.A. with eighty-three children lost—seven saved—and thirty-six Lascars saved. The Lascars rushed the boats. Not to publish till Monday so that all parents advised first.

Eight hours working downstairs in the basement. Then out after the first edition with Keith and Bob—looking at the damage in Holborn.

Raid alarm at 6 o'clock, and an immediate loud explosion in the sky. Direct hit on a raider? Dinner in the Strand.

Heavy raid about midnight. Keith and I walked through it on the way back to hotel and Savage Club.

Big fire N.W. London.

Bath, bed. Slept till 'all clear' between 5 and 6 a.m.

*Sunday, 22nd September, 1940*

Home again to country, via Brighton. Lovely on the hill. This is peace.

*Monday, 23rd September, 1940*

Lovely day. Lewes for 'elevenses'. Lunch, sleep.

To Brighton for tea—a deserted, preparing Brighton. Pill-boxes, sandbags, barbed wire on beaches and promenades.

All over the Downs and on open spaces large posts have been erected at regular intervals to prevent air landings.

The King on the wireless.

De Gaulle goes to Dakar. Looks as if the scrap is on.

*Tuesday, 24th September, 1940*

The news looks as if we have made a bloomer at Dakar and underestimated resistance, or sent an inadequate force to overcome the French. De Gaulle is withdrawing his troops.

At night in the clear, star-lit sky the bombers drone over London.

Went home very late to country.

*Wednesday, 25th September, 1940*

A lovely morning. Heavy explosions in the night near Seaford.

Went up on the 9.34 train to Victoria. Many delays. Train one-and-a-half hours late. Air raid ahead of us.

In the train the usual war talk—everyone talks to everyone else nowadays, exchange newspapers, etc. The old British restraint has gone.

A nice old boy in the seat opposite said: 'I blame Baldwin for the mess we're in now. He's the one. He's killed everything in this country. I say it deliberately although I'm an old Conservative. He had so much power and he didn't know what to do with it. He let us all down, and the Party were with him in letting us down.'

After Haywards Heath a neat and well-dressed little Frenchwoman and three soldiers—bound for Redcar in Yorkshire—one with an incessant sniff suggesting a heavy cold. I'd have given him a handkerchief if I'd had a spare one, but instead I gave myself a surreptitious antiseptic throat pastille. The little Frenchwoman afterwards told me she'd seen it happen and wished I'd given her one as well!

I gave her a lift in my taxi at Victoria and she told me about her business—wholesale clothes—and the time bomb at her premises. And about how she hated Germans and longed for the old France again. Her sister got back from Amiens just in time.

Vivacious little woman, reminiscent of Yvonne Arnaud in accent, she is staying near Eastbourne, alone in a big house with her young daughter. They are frequently bombed, and in the excitement the other day she mislaid her handbag with £300 in notes (five-pound and ten-pound notes) which she had drawn from her bank preparatory to evacuating to Wales to join her sister.

The young detective investigating the case asked her for the numbers of the notes. She confessed she hadn't taken numbers: 'They were just five- and ten-pound notes, you know.'

'I *don't* know', he said. 'I've never seen one.'

'Well, you will', she said, 'if you find this bag!'

Went on to the office to cope with difficulties following direct bomb hit on Monday morning at 4.30.

It had penetrated the twelve-inch concrete roof, passed through the *Sunday Chronicle* case-room, destroying seven of our linotype machines, wrecked Jagelman's office, exploded through the twelve-inch concrete and steel floor to the editorial room and wrecked it completely, killing the only man working at the time, a photographer. Maxwell—a kindly, inoffensive little man who never did a German a bad turn in his life.

Difficulties this week in production. Trying for Somerset Maugham articles on Britain.

Phyllis Digby Morton and her husband were on the *City of Benares* and were saved. Saw this through picture in *Daily Mail*. Tried to get in touch with Phyllis for story, but Amalgamated Press, where she works, also hit, or phones out of action and could not reach her.

The photograph in the *Mail* shows Phyllis wearing a pair of sailor's trousers with a coat thrown over her shoulders. Her arm is in a sling: she looks as if she had been through plenty.

The picture was taken at one of those unnamed Scottish ports which frequently figure in the news nowadays. Phyllis and Digby, survivors from the *City of Benares*, are seen coming ashore from a naval vessel.

They were lucky at that. Two hundred and sixty of the

passengers and crew of the *City of Benares*, including seventy-nine children, did not live to tell the tale of its torpedoing. Phyllis and her husband sailed for America on a business trip. Three days later, in the darkness of the night, the ship was torpedoed.

The *City of Benares* was carrying many little children away from these shores to the safety of friendly America.

Thousands of parents here have been negotiating to get their children away; thousands of homes in the United States were being made ready to receive them; our own two children might have been on the *Benares* if we had not cancelled all our plans for their evacuation.

The ship had ninety youngsters on board.

Phyllis told me about it later. She remembers vividly the faces of the frightened Lascars who were part of the crew. There was a nightmare experience of scrambling into clothes and crawling over the lurching ship; the crash of a second explosion; the dreadful business of getting half-dazed children away in the boats.

The submarine came to the surface and blinded them with its searchlight. In the sleet and driving rain, and into a huge sea, the boats were lowered. Their boat crashed against the sinking ship. A big hole in it let in the icy sea up to their waists. They had no oars, and nothing to bale out with.

'And if we had', Phyllis tells me, 'it would have been no use.'

In fact, it was because they were waterlogged that their boat did not turn over when the ship went down in flames. For twenty hours they were in that lifeboat before being picked up by a destroyer, and of the twenty-six people in the boat only thirteen survived.

I lunched alone and had hair-cut and manicure afterwards. My manicurist, looking depressed, finally revealed that her home had been wrecked by bomb—lucky escape of herself and mother.

'Last night we slept in a car in a field', she said. 'My mother is so nervous now. When the sirens start she begins to weep.'

Hitler certainly knows something about striking terror.

Mrs Sones also got bombs close to her last night, and for the first time mentioned her daughter Audrey. 'I'm beginning to feel that it's almost a blessing she's gone', she said. 'She's missing this, anyhow.'

Yes, we've bitched it at Dakar. The Germans and Italians and 'loyal' French reinforcements got there before us. The result not known yet. In the evening wrote a magazine article: 'If there is a Friday'. As it's some attempt to describe people's feelings and attitudes today, I'll put it in the diary.

### IF THERE IS A FRIDAY

They stood at the street corner as the bus drew to a halt. Just two ordinary nice people, a young woman working all day in an office or war factory, a young man who might be in civvies on leave from the R.A.F.

In their way they represented all the young women and men in this country of ours. There was nothing spectacular about them, nothing seemingly heroic. You would scarcely separate them from scores of other couples in any crowd.

But as he helped her on to the bus step, the young man murmured: 'Goodbye. Take care of yourself. See you on Friday.'

She flashed a quick smile at him as he drew back on to the kerb. She called out to him from the bus platform: 'Rather! If there is a Friday!'

*If there is a Friday!* They smiled in perfect understanding, a world of meaning in the lingering glance that bound them as surely as a hand-clasp. I was aware of a deep bond between these two people that nothing much could break.

And as I watched the bus go off and the young man look after it and then turn away, still smiling, it seemed to me that their gesture, their seemingly casual acceptance of facts, in itself defeated these facts. They were rising above their dangers.

There was a time, not so long ago, when you could plan ahead. In a secure world, with sane, solid institutions, it was possible to say, 'Let's see. What are we doing on Wednesday? Shall we have the Browns to dinner that evening?' Or perhaps: 'Nice if we had a night out next week. Let's go to.'

a show and sup and dance afterwards. What about Tuesday?' Or: 'What if we run over to mother's on Sunday, darling? You know how she likes to see the children.'

All these weren't rare treats plucked from the impossible. They were routine. They were part and parcel of the plan of our lives. They were our right. 'So much so, that one scarcely realised the pleasure and the privilege of them.

They had been things that milestoned our lives. The evening at the movies, the picnic on Sunday, the visit to Auntie Meg; the game of bridge or whist with the Smiths; the cup of tea with Mrs Jones; the round of the shops with Alice—eternally seeing the hat that was simply made for her.

What millions of other regular, established customs filled our lives! Joe's game of golf on the Sunday afternoon, and the tea and hot buttered toast he liked to come home to. Plenty of toast, *and* plenty of butter. In front of a blazing fire, while he stretched his legs and told the wife endless details of his drive to the sixteenth green while she wished silently that he'd changed his golf shoes before striding over the carpet.

If anyone had told us then that we had a lot to be thankful for, we might have agreed, but agreed without fully understanding. If anyone had questioned the possibility of next Sunday's visit with the children to mother, we should have been quite prepared to admit that yes, of course, it *did* all depend on the weather.

But if someone had said, 'If there *is* a Sunday!' it would have been like questioning the existence of the children. It would have been an absurd thing to say.

It isn't absurd any longer, and because it isn't, we have all learned a great lesson and a great truth. And we are all looking at each other with a little more understanding as we make 'dates' which circumstances may cancel out long before we meet again, or plan little treats which fate can snatch from us without a qualm.

And surely we have all grown braver in consequence and much more human. It is in no spirit of fatalism or defeatism that we smile to each other and say, 'If there *is* a Friday!' or 'Invasion permitting' or 'I'd better ring up Adolf first!'

Anything but. It's simply that we have all grown to realise that endless possibilities can arise to upset our plans and separate us for longer than we expected.

And we are learning, too, to set store by the things that really count. Somewhere deep in most of us at this time is the new understanding that a lot of the things to which we attached importance were not really important after all.

If life has grown more precarious; it has also become infinitely more precious. All of us, I think, are richer in our understanding that mere material possessions and money in the bank count for little now compared to the great joy of just living.

We are growing to be grateful for those simple little things we always took for granted—if we noticed them at all.

'If there is a Friday' means that if we can manage to be together again then it will be enough to be together. It will be enough to see each other, to touch each other, to hear an accustomed voice that is like music in a world of din.

That will be enough. More than enough. That is all we want.

We are really getting down to essentials at last.

In this country we haven't before within living memory been threatened with the overnight disappearing of our homes, the wholesale destruction of our jobs, the removal of families and loved possessions. If the normal routine of our lives had been dislocated at all it was at the most for a very short period and through a cause that could be tackled and remedied immediately.

In a way we've been spoilt. It is doubtful if any of us has ever been sufficiently grateful for the blessings showered on us. We've had a whale of a time! And we took so much for granted.

Happy childhood, surrounded by loving and solicitous grown-ups who saw that no harm came to us. Happy schooldays with the making of life-long friendships. A snug, secure, unthreatened little world of our own. Never too much money, perhaps, but somehow always just enough—scraped together only our parents knew how!—to give us most of the treasures we desired.

And after school—if you were a boy—the job in dad's office, or that billet uncle Arthur knew about, or the introduction to old Jim, who had once been such a friend of uncle Fred's. It was pretty easy, when you come to think of it, with not too great a need for the early pioneering spirit of our forefathers.

Or if you were a girl, the shorthand-typing school so that you could get a secretary's job. And someone always knew someone else who wanted a girl in his office. Or, if you were fond of animals, the job at the kennels. Or, keen on dress, the opening at the new clothes shop that your friends would have given their ears for.

Or perhaps you just became a kind of companion to mother, doing the house with her, looking after the garden, going into town to shop together. She liked to have her grown-up daughter with her—it was a tribute to her own youthful looks—and after a while you fell into the easy way of just being an amiable kind of yes-girl.

Life was pleasant and languid and unhurried. You played tennis at the club with all the rest of the gang, you were keen on the activities of the church, and were always on tap for bazaars, sales of work, flag days or any charitable job that needed doing.

It didn't tax your energies too much, but you worked hard and willingly. There was Bill to dance with and John to trek with on Saturdays over the hills or the moors. And in due course you and John knew absolutely certainly that you couldn't do without each other.

There weren't too many obstacles put in your way. At first a little gentle banter, then one or two chats with daddy and mummy, but you all knew it was all right, because John had a good position in the electricity department, or the new housing project, and his people were so much like yours in their ways and their possessions that it was obvious everything was just falling for you as it should.

Then the engagement, and the choosing of the ring, and the lovely busy time you had with mother making things and buying things and choosing things. All the excitement—and the gentle irritation—of the wedding arrangements, the



discussions about where you were going to live, and the happy business of the bridesmaids, presents, and so on.

It wasn't a bit like the movies. There was nothing dramatic or frightfully exciting about it. Of course it was a thrill, but it was the thrill of assurance. You had always known it would be like this, and John and you had a pretty fair-sized instinct about it. The course of true love went smoothly, in spite of the saying to the contrary.

And in due course you were married, and mummy wept a little and the local paper put all the wrong presents against the names of your guests, and the vicar made the usual little speech which everybody pretended was awfully funny. And it was nice, after it was all over, to slip away with John, and look back through the car window and see them all standing there at the side of the road waving to you wishing you well, praying you Godspeed. Mummy with her handkerchief pressed tightly in her hand; daddy a little lost and lonely-looking somehow, staring after you, not waving; all the dear others—your friends—glad in your gladness. You'd never forget the picture they made.

And after that—a home, children, ups-and-downs with all the usual troubles of infancy. But through it all a certain assured routine, a time of pleasant growing-up together, you watching over the developments of the children, John making sure of his position in life.

Not much threatened you. Not much threatened any of us. The miracle is that from a life so sheltered and easy, so many of us have emerged to adapt ourselves to the new dangers, the new uncertainty, the ever-present menace.

And now husbands are gone from home; children have gone from home; home itself is for ever in the front line.

If there is a Friday! That we can make a joke of it is the triumph of the spirit over generations of easy-going which might have destroyed it.

That young man and woman, on the kerb, smiling into each other's eyes, tacitly acknowledging the abyss, but bridging it with their faith, are all of us. They are an assurance that there will always be a Friday.

# 8

*Thursday, 26th September, 1940*

**B**UGHT Somerset Maugham articles on France and Britain for the paper.

This awful problem of undergrounds and shelters will have to be settled soon. Long queues every night—frightful sanitary conditions.

Went out at 2.15 for late lunch at 'Café Royal'; place packed. Café Royal now closes after lunch. All London is dead at 8 o'clock in the evening. Only one theatre remains open—the Windmill.

The de Gaulle-Dakar fiasco is complete. The story is that there was some sort of dinner in London before the send-off and Vichy got to know how many men were going and what ships we were sending to accompany them.

They were ready for the de Gaulle expedition when it arrived. A mess. At this moment the British people need more than anything some tonic-news of success; and Dakar, properly carried out, would have provided it.

*Friday, 27th September, 1940*

Letter from Geoffrey Lewis on convoy duty in Atlantic. His four children are now safely in America, his two houses in England occupied by military.

Three daylight raids on London, which took another socking last night. Germans are dropping land mines which destroy huge areas. More bombs near our office.

Japan—German—Italy alliance. Looks like the Nazis are shutting the door behind them before some big future action.

*Saturday, 28th September, 1940*

Miserable day in the office, working underground. I hate going to earth. Lunch on my desk from the canteen—our room is next to the 'Ladies'. Verily we work in the bowels of the earth.'

After a day of this, and a night spent on a camp-bed in the workshop, I begin to realise why the Maginot Line complex beat the French. When I was sleeping during air raids every night on the fourth floor of my hotel, I felt in the thick of it—at least part of it. Down in the basement of the office one feels remote, less inclined to take the risks above ground which formerly left one quite undisturbed.

First U.S. destroyers arrive.

Had dinner between editions of the paper in the Strand. Back through banging guns and swishing bombs to the office. No taxi to be found.

A brandy and ginger-ale with Bob before turning in at 11 a.m. And then down to it, like a soldier in a dugout.

A rotten night. Noise of the printing presses, voices, doors banging, feet going up and down the stairs.

*Sunday, 29th September, 1940*

Glad to get up, and go out into the air, unshaved, to the Strand for breakfast on my way to Victoria. Orange-juice, coffee and a kipper.

Arrived at Brighton station in air raid. Home to lunch and bed.

Afterwards saw air battle from our hill. So sudden and swift that it was all over in a flash. The sound of engines, a plane coming out of the clouds with another tearing after it—and then two more tearing after that.

The first was one of ours, caught unawares—apparently. There was the boom-boom-boom of a German cannon, and over towards Newhaven a plane diving and swirling to the ground.

It crashed on its nose, and burst into a huge flame. A few minutes later, German bombers making for home dropped bombs—one just beyond Lewes, one over at Denton.

*Monday, 30th September, 1940*

The last day of an incredibly lovely summer; going out as beautifully as it came in. To Seaford for six holes of golf, and after lunch to Brighton with Marjorie.

Air raid when we arrived—planes hanging high in the sky, leaving exhaust trails like ski marks.

Afterwards tried to get petrol—last day of ration—and succeeded.

Home to Lewes and went to the local cinema—Martha Raye in *The Farmer's Daughter* and Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in *Remember the Night*. Not too bad. Air raid announced during performance, but only one or two people left.

A miserable crawl home in the dark, side-lights only used on the car.

*Tuesday, 1st October, 1940*

Lovely morning. As we left the hill for the station a German plane was drawing smoke circle in the sky—the Nazi way of guiding poor navigators to the shoot. High wind soon blew it away.

Going back to country in the train this evening I ran into the oddest coincidence.

One day at the beginning of the raids I was coming back to London from Devon. I was having lunch in the train dining-car. A woman came in, asked the steward if she could have a flask of boiling hot water, and sat down in the empty seat opposite me to wait for it.

I guessed that she wanted the sterilised water for a very young child, and having just left my own two evacuated youngsters, we spoke of children. The water took some time to make its appearance, and our talk led naturally to kindred subjects.

The woman was Norwegian. I asked, very interested, how she had managed to get away when the Germans entered Norway. She was already in England, she said, but her husband—an Englishman—had just got away in time on

the last plane from Oslo before the Germans invaded at dawn.

The flask of boiled water came, the woman departed with a pleasant smile. I never saw her again. I never knew her name . . .

And now this evening, in another corner of England altogether, months later, I was in a very crowded train. My carriage was full of business men and, deep in a book, I paid little attention to them. Until . . . just before Hayward's Heath, one man said to another:

' . . . Well, you were lucky to get out of Norway . . . '

'Yes,' replied the other, 'I was. I got out on the last plane to leave Oslo. The Germans came in next morning.'

A bell tinkled in my brain and I remembered that earlier meeting. The speaker was rising to leave the train as it slowed down at Haywards Heath. I could not let him go like that. So I quickly told him about that earlier conversation on a train coming up from Devon.

He knew all about it.

'Yes, that was my wife,' he said, smiling. 'She told me about meeting you. . . . What a coincidence that we should meet like this!'

*Wednesday, 2nd October, 1940*

Bob on holiday. Keith getting teeth out preparatory to joining R.A.F. at Torquay. Busy day but went home again to country in the evening.

*Thursday, 3rd October, 1940*

Same sort of programme. Oh, for something definite to do with the war!

*Friday, 4th October, 1940*

Lunch with Geoffrey Lewis, home on leave, at La Coquille. A dozen oysters and Guinness. Geoff in uniform is the perfect naval commander and looks as young as Freddie.

Bartholomew. His decorations—including a last-war D.F.C.—look absurd on him.

He is in the *California*, an armed cruiser. Most exciting time, he says, was the *Deutschland* and *Kawalpindi* incident, trying to guess where *Deutschland* would go after the fight.

Geoff has the last-war idea of leave—dinner and dance at the Savoy! He doesn't know this London of today.

At lunch, sitting with a friend of ours, was a beautiful dark-haired and dark-eyed girl, very generous with her wide-mouthed smile to Geoff. I could hardly blame her.

Miserable hellish weather, rain, low clouds, rising wind. But bombs as usual.

Somerset Maugham articles are first-rate. Good paper in spite of shortage of help. Keith came in. His wedding to Betty is off for the moment.

*Saturday, 5th October, 1940*

Time bombs dropped near Lewes station as I arrived under the glass roof this morning on my way to London. Everybody bent down instinctively. Lone raider—second day running.

In the office a telegram was waiting for me from the Air Ministry telling me to report at Adastral House. At last!